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GEND OF

ERRY LADD

BY ROLFE GILSON







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## **THE LEGEND OF JERRY LADD**



# THE LEGEND OF JERRY LADD

BY ROY ROLFE GILSON

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*Author of "Ember Light," "The Wistful Years," "Katrina,"  
"In the Morning Glow," etc.*



V.C.

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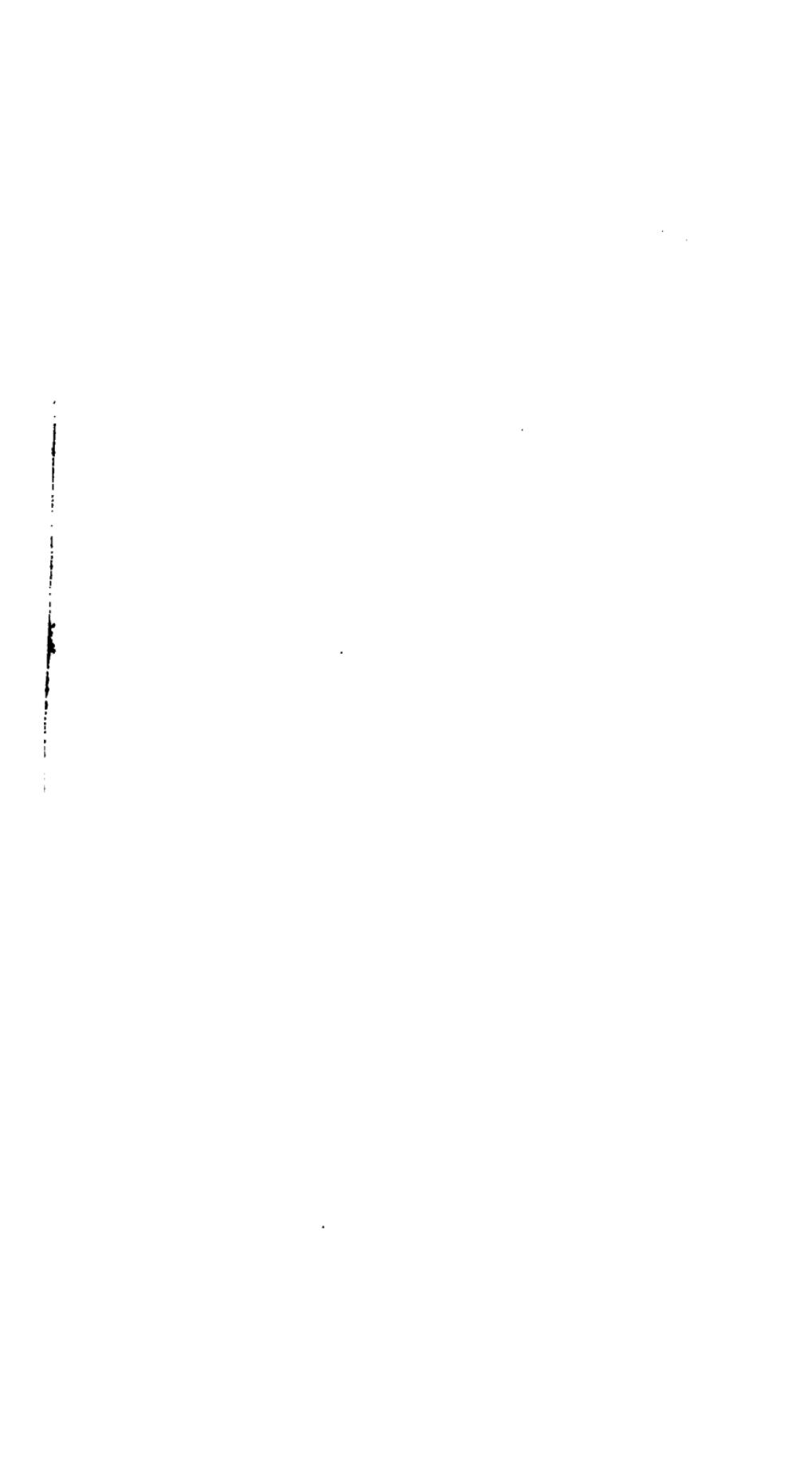
MAR 28 1913

**TO THE MEMORY OF JERRY**



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## **THE LEGEND OF JERRY LADD**



# I

## THIS DREAMER COMETH

**I** WAS always fond of him," said one, "as you all know. But he was a fool."

"Or a genius," said another. "You never can tell."

"A child rather, I should say," observed a third. "He never grew up."

"But something of a poet too, don't you think?" ventured a woman's voice. "Though not in verse, or prose either, for that matter. In life, I mean."

"Well, yes," one of them conceded, in a juster tone than he had used before. "Jerry was what you might call a rhapsodist. Certainly an unpractical man. An idealist, a dreamer, always."

"Illusionist is the better word," another voice suggested.

"That is to say," interposed the one who had used a harsher name, "he was a visionary."

"Oh, yes. He was always seeing visions, Jerry was,"

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murmured another who had not yet spoken. "He was not of this world. He was always a stranger here. Let us hope that he is more at home where he is now."

And all were silent. It was that silence of remembrance, more eloquent, more final than any speech — each one waiting in the consciousness that, after all, a visionary's life could only be summed up in reverie. And yet, somehow, the woman did find words for it, saying them softly like a sigh —

"Poor St. Jerry!"

And all the rest, surprised in their own compassion, and astonished that it should be so simply and yet so perfectly revealed in words, and in the very spirit of the one thus canonized forever in the calendar of their remembrance, looked up and smiled.

Such were the doubtful verdicts of the world when he was gone. Often, since, I have been haunted by his story. It is a tale more common than I used to think. I have known few like him, but I have met often, in the thoroughfares of life, strange faces in whose lights and shadows I have seen his own again. And, for his sake, I have always felt for them a certain friendliness of pity — a wistful, helpless, hopeless kind of pity, for however I may think, or write, about him —just as however I tried to hold him, as it were,



when he was here — he always eludes my imagination as he did my hand. His coat-tails always seemed slipping from my grasp. And even now I scarce know how to keep his memory fast long enough to be quite sure that it is fairly and truly here.

Of those doubtful verdicts, each one, perhaps, was partly right. But, on the other hand, it is very likely that none of us did Jerry justice. I do not pretend to say. All I can be sure of is that he seldom saw with our eyes at all, nor we with his. Sometimes, touched to a kind of tenderness that one does not easily confess, I am inclined to think that it was he who had the truer vision; that he saw more deeply than the rest of us. But he was so unpractical, and he was such an ungovernable enthusiast for those lovely desirable things that we all dream of when we are young, but fail, somehow, to realize in our maturity. And he would not compromise with life. Could not, it may be. That was the exasperating thing about him. That was what made one's fingers ache, sometimes, to shake him into what the world calls common sense.

And yet . . . one is ashamed to quarrel with those angelic visions. I remember his saying once, when some one spoke of the lack of common sense in another imaginative friend of ours:

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"Perhaps he has *uncommon* sense."

Perhaps Jerry had.

Poor St. Jerry! For one always comes back to that extravagant, half-sad, half-humorous, but altogether final phrase. And he was faithful, unto death, to those beauties that were so dim to us, but so bright and real to him that he saw them, his wife once told us, "even on weekdays." And she said it with a proud, defiant, little smile that reminded one of us at least that he always had *his* visions of a Sunday.

She herself was a heroine — Barbara Ladd. For it is all very well to go flying about on wings that nobody else can see, if only you can feel them for yourself, buoying you up over threatening seas. But to be bound helpless, as a wife, to such an air-man — to go sailing on into the clouds, while he assures you that you are really safe with him, upborne by angels whose light, perhaps, is in his eyes, but whose hands would be a deal more sure and comforting if only you could feel them clutching your skirts and holding you fast from those terrible realities beneath — that, it seems to me, is the daftest, most breathless heroism in the world. And Barbara had it.

But, I am told, I forget that Barbara herself had wings to fly with — wings all her own, of love. True.

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And that love could flame as well as fly, as one of us has reason to recall. I mean, of course, the devil's advocate. He shall be nameless, though I have quoted him. He was not myself. He was that other — friend, who said that Jerry was a fool; and who had the temerity to write to Barbara, even in her grief, words that she never could forgive, much less forget.

"After all," he told her, "deeply sympathizing as I do with you in your great sorrow, one cannot — I assume that even you cannot in your heart of hearts — be really sorry that he has been saved the inevitable pain of a world for which he was always so unfitted. Had he lived, no one can say what bitter sorrow and disillusionment he might have come to."

"What right," cried Barbara, with trembling lips and swimming eyes, "what right has he, or any other man, to write like that? Smug little worldling! As if Jerry was all wrong! And he, of course, all right! To be so sure, in his conceit, that failure was inevitable for — for a man a million times more . . . and to talk about my 'heart of hearts'! What does he know about a woman's heart of hearts, who hasn't any of his own?"

Grief, of course, can hardly be expected to be philosophical; and, on the other hand, a devil's advocate

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must say hard things — which may be true. But, after all, in spite of them, Jeremy, with all his frailties, was beatified and canonized for those outnumbering virtues that shone so wonderfully through Barbara's tears.

"A man like Jeremy," I am told on the very best authority, "arouses the mother in the wife."

Certainly Barbara mothered him. What would have happened if she had had no brooding pity to arouse, no steadfast sense of homely duty, no meek and simple faith in a Providence that watches over little children, even grown ones, in their dreams, it might have puzzled the devil's advocate himself to say. And he was quite familiar with such contingencies.

She had two children, Barbara had. The elder was St. Jerry.

### II

I knew him first, quite fittingly, as a man of words. He was Our Correspondent in a place called Toodlums. The postoffice was Veteran; old residents of the little town still spoke of it sometimes as Unionville, after a former fashion; but "folks generally" called it Toodlums — a term of endearment whose derivation I have forgotten, if I ever knew. It was the merest trifle of a village, but of a remarkable productiveness, out of all proportion to its geographical significance, in the

way of literary fires, elopements, weddings, accidents, and lawsuits, with an occasional crime. That is to say, the news that came to us from Toodlums always had a certain Cranford flavour, as if that charming old English village might have somehow emigrated to America — dames, spinsters, bachelors, Jerry Ladd, and all.

As the junior editor of the *Gazette* — published at the county seat some miles from Toodlums — it fell to my apprentice hand to arrange, weekly, a dreary mass of county items that came in by mail. They were written on odd sheets of paper, in outlandish hands, ludicrously misspelled, and terribly befuddled as to tenses; and one had to keep a vigilant and clairvoyant eye, which all editors are expected to possess, upon the dull monotony of personal allusions, lest rustic wit and malice should creep in unawares, and the *Gazette* should suffer in a suit for libel. It was a thankless task, and a mournful; for, in the main, country life appeared to be a sad succession of influenzas, sociables, new barns, and babies, and — regularly, once a week — Another Old Resident Gone.

Toodlums, however, was an exception to the rule. It was a poor week when I did not smile gratefully at the appearance of Jeremy Ladd. He came in a yellow

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envelope bearing in one corner the name of some brick concern by which, I fancied, he was employed. And he brought with him not merely the homely gossip of the country store, but something of the woods and fields as well — little sunlit touches that made his Toodlums an idyllic background for his humble chronicles, so that I imagined it must be different from our other country scenes, and even thought of seeing it some day myself. Sentimental beyond a doubt, and a little immature — high-schoolish is perhaps the word, if it *is* a word — Jeremy's writings, from my own young point of view, were beyond reproach, and they were highly literary for the *Gazette*. If it had not been for the brick concern, one might have guessed him the village schoolmaster, earning funds for a university career. But he was hardly text-bookish enough for that. He was too imaginative. If there was a Cranford in his Toodlums, there was a something more subtly, more elusively English in himself. Yet not English in any modern sense. Not at all British. English in a sense more ancient even than Cranford days. It was Elizabethan, though I did not understand it to be so then. And how it was Elizabethan is better left for a more timely page. Then, when I was editing his classic items, I only knew that they had in

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them an alien atmosphere of hawthorn-scented lanes. And I am afraid I expected to find hawthorn-hedges when I went to Toodlums.

One thing I did expect, and found. There was a little river there, very Englishy, which had a way of meandering through his correspondence, placidly in and out of its hay-fields and its mild adventures, but with treacherously rushy places, and lilded havens, where Toodlums youngsters had a way sometimes of getting drowned. On such occasions I am sure that it was a cross to Jeremy that he had to mention the village "cemetery" when his pen so naturally would have written "churchyard." And it is sad to think how always he must have nibbled at his pen trying to contrive some way of using all the lovely old English words that, with their tender meanings, we left behind us when we came away. Once, I know, the *Gazette* received a protest from the Methodist minister at Toodlums complaining that Our Correspondent showed a strange partiality for the services at the little Protestant Episcopal mission chapel which had lately been erected there. Strange! It was not strange at all. Not that Jerry was a churchman. On the contrary, he preferred to listen to the Sabbath bells from the safe seclusion of the river meadows. But the

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mission had extended his vocabulary, or, rather, it had set free from that secret and imprisoned music of his thoughts certain exquisite old words that he could write at last — matins and evensong, Advent, Whitsuntide, and a dozen others that blossomed thereafter in the *Gazette*, like English primroses among the more familiar flowers of our native speech.

I have forgotten much, but when the brickyard burned — it did so twice during my incumbency — Our Correspondent was on the spot, and I remember how the “river’s musing face was flushed with firelight.” Brickyards, it should be remembered, burn best in the middle of the night. And “all the countryside” rose from bed to “watch the glamour in the sky.” Now editors are far more grateful than other people think; and it was pleasant — seated in a stuffy office two days afterward — to open that yellow envelope and see in a flash “the illumined landscape,” and feel “the cool air of the country night” (I think it was) upon one’s cheek, while one listened to “the crashing of the sheds.” Nothing to delete. No mention whatever of “the devouring element” that wrought such havoc in our other country towns. Nor do I remember even “ruddy flames.” Simply the firelight and the glamour in the sky!

Probably he forgot to mention the insurance — if

indeed such inflammable risks as brickyards ever have any. And, at any rate, insurance would have been a modern touch — a veritable anachronism in Jerry Ladd. And when did he ever remember money in connection with a vision?

Then there was the human side. Life in Toodlums, according to Jeremy, had the homely glow that country faces have — or used to have, in old English ballads — when they stop to grin with you in the middle of the road. There was Uncle Nat Jones. Uncle Nat was not "confined to the house." He was not "suffering with a cold." Nor with "an attack of grip." There was, in fact, no mention of his head whatever. But Jerry interviewed him, I remember — it was some question of Toodlums politics, perhaps — and reported faithfully what Uncle Nat had said. Just that and nothing more — word for word, snuffle for snuffle! One scarce could read it without a handkerchief.

Now that, to my young journalistic mind, was Art. Pure Art. And I wrote Ladd so. It was the beginning of our correspondence.

### III

Through it — through those private confidences — the little English river flowed more beautifully, more

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intimately, and with a gentler, more retrospective, Elizabethan air than ever had been possible in print.

"You ought to be a ferryman," I wrote.

"I am," he answered. "I ferry dreams across to the other side, where they vanish behind the willows, leaving me to row myself back alone to the brickyard. You see my office window overlooks the stream and I have long idle moments to myself between the weigh-bills."

"I begin to have suspicions," I replied next week, "that you are only a poet, after all."

A fortnight passed.

"*A poet!*" I said again. "You have all the earmarks."

"P.S." was his reply — for I have the old letters before me, both his and mine, upon my desk. "Now about that poet-business: Your communication has been duly filed, and will be taken up at the earliest possible opportunity. The fact is, I'm waiting to hear from *Life*."

"P.S.S. I've heard. The mail's just in and the rumour that you mentioned is without foundation."

"Send them the Snuffles," I suggested. "Uncle Nat Jones."

"I did."

"Don't be disheartened," I entreated.

"I'm not. You see," he explained — and the explanation throws light upon his life — "I'm never *permanently* disheartened. I get blue. You mightn't think so, but Toodlums at times is indigo. Then I smoke my brier, and look at the river, and think what my Uncle Charles Lamb would have said, if he'd cared for rivers (it was the town *be* loved), and, little by little, the blue turns to softest purple, and the purple to a fine kind of blooming rose."

"What would your Uncle Charles Lamb have said," I inquired the next Sunday, "if he'd cared for rivers?"

And on Tuesday —

"I really don't know," was his reply. "But something elderly. Something calculated to make a little old young man in a brickyard content to be there, with his unpublished whimsies locked up tight in the office drawer."

And then he added what reads now like the best text that I can think of, for a sermon on Jerry's life; and it would, of course, be variously expounded:

*"Lamb, you know, always makes mere reverie seem a legitimate vocation."*

I shall not preach from this any more than may be inevitable in recalling a life that was mostly reverie

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from first to last. Whether or not it is ever a "legitimate vocation"—whether there is any room left for the contemplative man who is merely contemplative and nothing more, in a world where most men are merely active and nothing more—I am not, in these robust times, prepared to say. It is as much as one's life is worth to waste a moment in meditation. Certainly the roads are no longer safe, and even the little absent-minded lanes, where the cow-bells used to tinkle and the wild bees hummed, are perilous with hoarse-voiced dragons breathing smoke and fire. Nature herself has been roused from reverie. How or where shall man dream quietly any more, when, at any turn, even among the brier-roses, he must look sharp, hurry up, move lively?

And it is considered heresy to preach anything but dynamics now. To do so fittingly one must raise the roof, or make the everlasting hills resound; so that to lift a quiet voice—in which alone one may plead becomingly for the static life—is to waste one's breath.

Moreover, as the contemplative man will learn in sorrow, it is a question also of finance. Reverie, perhaps, is only moral when it has a bank account.

At any rate, so far as Jerry was concerned, his mani-

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fest vocation — the only one that he ever had seemed fitted for, or that he ever pursued to any purpose — is a thing that one would wish to think about, and write about, before one came to a conclusion. My own comment at this time, I find, related solely to his comment on his uncle's writings.

"Good heavens!" I retorted. "What right has a literary critic to live in Toodlums?"

"It's the only way *to* live in Toodlums," was his reply. "Books are the only things that make life bearable. You have no idea what a hole this is."

"Hole?" I cried. "Toodlums a hole? Why, I thought it was an Eden where they made bricks. Or at least a bit of dear old England. What about the river?"

"Oh, damn the river!" he fairly shouted through the mail. "I've tired of the river. I'm looking at it now. I'm always looking at it. It's a mere ditch of a river — slow as time, and quiet as the dead. I'm tired, I tell you, of this living in the past. I want the *sea!* The stir and roar of things that have a future in them. You know what I mean: the sea of life — dreadful, but deep, and endless. I should drown, probably; but at least I should have had to fight a little first, striving

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to save myself. And that would be better than all this shallow meandering in a meadow dream."

But even that — all that fine bravado — was but a dream. Jerry himself suspected it, it seems, for in his next letter he confesses:

"Something tells me that I am unfitted for this world. It is a matter of eyesight, apparently. I don't seem to see what other folks are seeing; nor do they see what I see. And so, after all, perhaps the little quiet places are the safest . . . only in being quiet, I should like not to be mute. I should like to *say* something. I should like to sing, not merely be mured up in this little cage of a country town, whose bars just now are gilded by the setting sun. It is odd, but — living so much in the past, I suppose — I have always imagined myself *old*. Really seen myself, always, as an old man. But old in a young fashion — like a russet apple. Rusty, ripe, and mellow. That's why I took to Lamb, I suppose . . . and while you, with your ambitions, are rising into fame, one of these days I and the little old river will be meandering down the valley together, quarrelling now and then, and falling out, but, at the next bridge, making up again."

"You have the true russet flavour," I acknowledged.  
"But look out! You are growing old in the wrong

direction. You have turned time around. Now you are in the Elizabethan age, but if you keep on living backward, you'll die a contemporary of the Canterbury pilgrims. Better come away from Toodlums — *your* Toodlums, the old English poetry town — before it is too late. Come down into modern times. There is a very pretty route (for quiet, old-fashioned people like yourself), by way of Milton, Pope, Burns, Wordsworth, and Alfred Tennyson — with side excursions. But the shorter way (and you might as well do this business up at once, and get it over) is to change your knee-breeches for peg-tops, kiss all your milkmaids good-bye under the hawthorn tree, and take the choo-choo cars for this glorious present, which you seem to have utterly forgot. In other words, Come and see me."

"No, you come here," was his reply. "Mother will make you any kind of pie you like, and I'll take a holiday and show you Toodlums. *My* Toodlums! It's really very pretty. At least I think it's pretty. Perhaps you'll have to squint at it a little the way the artists do. Or do a little reading first, the way I did, in good old English verse, before I really saw its loveliness. But come. Come Saturday and spend a Sunday with us, and we'll go a-rivering."

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And then he added these singular but prophetic words. Odd-sounding at the time — quaintly, but rather foolishly self-conscious, I thought them then — they come back now like an echo of his life:

"You speak of friendship, but I warn you in advance that nobody ever knows me who is not kind to me, but always, after a while, with a little mixture of indulgence — as if they liked me, somehow, but could never find a good, sure reason for it, and so were doubtful that my claim upon them was quite so valid as it seemed."

### IV

I went to Toodlums.

It was, as Jerry had foreseen, a matter of eyesight; and I failed perhaps to squint the way the artists do, or I had read too little, or too much, to find the Toodlums of his dream, or mine. Candour compels me to confess the disappointment. It was not, so far as I could see, different from our other little country villages. It was not picturesque — to me. It was not long-built enough for that; nor were its sharp angles as yet sufficiently relieved by that shadowy grace of foliage which is the secret of most lovely little towns. Even the river when I first saw it seemed commonplace enough, though amiably complacent under my eager

gaze, as I was driven over it into the village street where Jerry awaited me before the postoffice.

We met, as young men meet, with a hearty shyness, and with a strained and rather incoherent effort to disclose ourselves — all our fine points — completely; and so, at first, talked fast, and both at once, in little futile outbursts of irrelevancy, laughing a great deal to cover our embarrassment, until the strangeness wore away. Elia, for example, was mentioned, as it were, in the first paragraph, in the same breath with which Jeremy told me he was glad I'd come; and while he deplored the fact that the weather was too dull to exhibit Toodlums at its best, I was apologizing for the razor-cut that impaired my own pretensions, which could ill afford so serious a defacement. Soon, however, all awkwardness was gone. It had vanished like a mist under those blessed rays of our youthful joy in one another, and then, but not till then, did my scattered senses begin to assemble their impressions of this long-anticipated friend.

He was always difficult to describe, because, as I can only say it, the spirit and the letter of him so oddly disagreed. One hesitates to call him homely, because his homely features always became so vague, and so inconsequential, even so handsome sometimes, illu-

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mined by that inner light. And after the first single glance of inquiry and its inevitable disappointment, it was the light one saw rather than the lamp in which it shone. I cannot even be positive as to his nose, or the colour of his eyes, though I think the latter were a kind of gray; and his nose, as one might say, was neither here nor there: really didn't matter. His mouth was — large enough; more I cannot pretend to say. His hair was dark, and his skin was what his poet would have called nut-brown. It had been caught, I suppose, in his Elizabethan hay-fields.

In short, of any sign, outward and visible, of that inward grace which had drawn me to him all those miles, I did not instantly make out one that was completely satisfying, or undeniable, though gradually, as our hearts found voices, my eyes caught gleams as of a light that I had always known, and my ear heard faint, far harmonies that seemed the echoes of familiar song. Attuned we were indeed, by youth. But there was something more. Perhaps it was the kind of youth we shared, and yet — there was something subtler still that drew me to him. Just what I never could define, and it eludes me now; but it held me always, even in those later years when I grew impatient with the vagaries that I could not follow. And it haunts

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me still, just now as a strange restraint upon my pen.

Hoveling about the memory of that Sunday which I spent with him are certain smiles, gently, almost timidly, benign, that were his mother's; and a consciousness of her ministrations, hardly more definite than firelight, but equally warming and comforting to our needs. Even with her bread before me, I scarcely gave a lingering thought to all that self-effacing kindness. Or was it so self-effacing as I thought? Rather, I blush to think, it was something else — we were so lost, Jeremy and I, in the preposterous selfishness of youth which, like a prince, takes all his regal world for granted, undreaming at what price of labour or of pain his ease and happiness are served. Not till that kingdom vanishes, and he becomes in time a page and serving-man himself, perhaps, to the usurpers of his former majesty, does he realize what I do now; what anxious care a hopeless invalid bestowed that day upon a royal visitor to her royal son.

All day we wandered by the river. Certain moments — their scene and setting, and their background of those farther, fairer vistas of the mind — opened, it might be, suddenly, by the magic of a word, and lighted for an instant by the flashing answer of a smile — still

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glow for me out of those hours that are now as shadowy as a dream. Certain tall cardinal flowers still flame for me, just as we came upon them in one of the lonelier reaches of the quiet waters. What we were talking of, I do not know; nor why they have remained so vivid through the intervening mist of years. I am almost certain that we did not speak of them; but we both stopped suddenly in our walk, with our eyes upon them. And somewhere by a bridge a bird flew up from our very feet, and vanished — like the reason for its long remembrance.

Foolish memories! to linger thus when weightier matters are so utterly forgot. For we spoke, I know, of those crises that come to youth, those mighty adventures of the spirit in its eager quests and wanderings in a world still fresh with dawn and glistening with dew. We poured out our pent-up thoughts and dreams, talking at once, finishing each other's sentences, and laughing outright in those delicious ecstasies of discovery and of revelation that are only to be shared so equally when life is young, before our paths diverge and lead us, through dissimilitudes of fortune and experience, to the imperfect sympathies of our maturity. Young love has come to mean nothing but the eternal legend of lad and lass. Yet the bonds in

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which two youths will stray blissfully, all day long, by little rivers, are very lovelike and lovely to recall. As one turns again those first idyllic pages of his life's romance, it is hard to say where his hand will pause and his eye rest longest. There are pages that are now too sweet. And there are others still full of poetry that, strange as it would once have seemed, have never a girl in them at all!

Yet there *was* a girl, of course, and if only she had been a Sally or a Phyllis I think Jerry's bliss would have been complete. Her name was Huldah. It was unfortunate, but he made the best of it; and I am sure there must have been something English about her to overcome so serious a defect. For while, no doubt, Huldah herself was blameless in the matter, it cast a shadow upon her parentage. It argued an unpoetic strain; to say the least, a singular forgetfulness of all those sweet old names for girls, kept fragrant in the lavender of English verse. I never saw more of her than a poor little village photograph on Jerry's bureau. She was a comely schoolgirl, and the English of her was perhaps revealed in one of his letters of that time, where I find him praising "the quiet candour of her eyes."

His own parentage was not beyond reproach. He

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ought to have been born in Warwickshire. It was late to think of it, of course, but it was very often upon Jerry's mind, as one could see in the wistfulness with which he showed me, one by one, on the walls of his room, copies of those charming drawings which Abbey and Parsons made to illustrate old English songs. When he died, he told me, he would go to England. He had, I remember, a quaint idea of heaven. It was to drink a mug of Shakespeare's ale in an Abbey inn, and pick Wordsworth's primroses by a Parsons brook.

"There's Rugby!" he said, as we passed the school-house — hopelessly wooden, and plain, and bare, and painted yellow.

"All but the vines," I answered.

"Oh, no!" he assured me. "Not if you have eyes."

It will be plain, I think, that Jerry Ladd never saw Toodlums or Huldah at all. I do not mean to say that in his visions he always was so whimsical; but it was in this investiture of the homely and sharp-edged things about him with something of the shadowy leafage of the past that others saw in him both child and fool. Childlike indeed, but not as a simpleton, he dreamed his little recompensive dreams. They touched me, rather, to a kind of pity that one who was so fond

## THIS DREAMER COMETH 27

of what was gone, and what was far from him, should be so caged in a present whose sign and symbol was little Toodlums. But as I drove away from it forever, waving my hand to him in token of the larger future beyond its bounds, I found some pleasure in a flight of crows across the pastures. For I had no doubt that they were rooks to him.

## II

### A STRANGER IN OUR MIDST

SOME years went by and I had long been freed from my apprenticeship to the *Gazette* when I saw him again. In the meantime so many things had happened of which I was mine own hero, after the fashion of young men, I paid small heed to the stories of my former friends. It was those years when, the prologue over, the drama of one's life begins; and in its crises, the past, still lovely in its simpler fashion, like an idyl, lived only as a kind of background for the present's storm and stress. It was like those landscape vistas in the old masterpieces, of which one is but dimly conscious until the foreground with its human legend has become familiar to the eye. I was busy with vicissitude. And in the turmoil of New York, and its bewilderment of strange adventure and romance, Toodlums and all the other little quiet places and friendly faces that I had known seemed years away.

## A STRANGER IN OUR MIDST 29

Meanwhile, I heard sometimes from Jerry Ladd. Often at first, in letters that I answered faithfully with chronicles of those hopes and wonders that I was always tempting him to share. But, little by little, the intimacy faded, like the days of which it seemed a part. And then, quite suddenly, it was resumed again.

One morning Jeremy came to town.

"For good," he told me, his face shining with the joy and mystery of his high adventure.

"But your mother!"

"Oh, she's come too."

"To stay?"

"To stay."

I laughed, and gasped.

"But the brickyard, man!"

He shook his head.

"*Asbes.*"

"Burned again?"

"No — just ashes."

He was all a-smile.

"And the river?"

He had expected that.

"What river?"

"The Avon, of course. The Toodlumshire Avon.  
Surely you haven't gone back on the river?"

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But he did not even sigh as he replied blissfully:  
"It flows no more!"

They had come, of course, solely for Jerry's sake. It was a venture of love — a mother's sacrifice for her only son, that he might in this larger world dream larger dreams. It was sufficient for her that he should see ahead of him a rosy mist. For herself her only future was of the past, and this strange new present never became real to her at all. Even in New York she was in Toodlums. The city, which it seemed he had been always seeing since I first wrote of it — a thousand towers in the glory of his rising sun — was only a mirage upon her evening sky. And even now that she was really there, streets to her never were those crowded thoroughfares in which she found herself bewildered and a little terrified. They were always those village lanes that she had known, under boughs whose rustlings no traffic ever drowned, and open to the wind, fragrant with the pastures where it had lingered, or cold and pure as its glistening trail of the untrodden snow. One could see this in her eyes.

They lodged — Jerry said charmingly, I thought drearily, and what his mother thought one could only guess, for she made no comment on the musty old board-

## A STRANGER IN OUR MIDST 31

ing-house that he had found for them — in an antiquated quarter of the town.

And he had found something more. He had discovered, somehow, somewhere, a "legitimate vocation." It was meagre enough, and it had the doubtful character of most beginnings. That is to say, it was little more than a chance of becoming something definite. I never quite made out just what it was, but it appeared to be a hybrid thing. He was something like a clerk, and something like a messenger, in one of those odd unheard-of commercial enterprises that supply details of more familiar things. His, I believe, furnished some kind of artificial whalebone for other houses' corsets. It was something very trifling at any rate so far as Jerry was concerned, though lucrative enough to give a poet — or whatever he was — a foothold in the world. I say a poet, because while Jerry's legs were running errands, his thoughts took wings and sailed and soared above the city's traffic in a way that I could only guess at, from the hints of cloud-rack in his eyes.

Now this is not a story of Jerry's legs. It must be remembered that he was never in the artificial whalebone business any more than he was ever really in that brickyard back in Toodlums. Just what he

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was, and where he was, all that time when his fleshly shadow was so humbly occupied in the eyes of men, should be worth inquiring. Certainly it was not the whalebone man I cared for. It was quite another fellow, whom the whalebone people never dreamed of — never hired, never paid. And if Jeremy had seen himself as *they* saw him, he would have walked straight down to that larger river which flowed conveniently at the end of his lodging street, and my story would have ended there.

That he could rise each morning, and eat, and smile, and even hum softly and happily to himself, as he went his way through the morning sunlight to the patent-whalebone place, was due entirely to the great secret throbbing within him, that he was *not* a patent-whalebone man. That, not the sun, was what made the morning shine. It was that which made him laugh, seemingly at nothing, to the wonder of the apple-lady. And it was that which nourished him — the very body of him; for certainly no mere boarding-house prunes and tapioca ever accounted for such animation.

Ah, yes! It was something to be alive thus, incognito. To realize what all those passing thousands never noticed and what his very friends but dimly guessed, though they themselves went by, each day,

## A STRANGER IN OUR MIDST 33

disguised. When they would discover him — the real Jeremy; when, if ever, the legend of his life would be read through that prosaic chronicle of his every-days, by which it was obscured, it was impossible to even dream. But he could afford to wait. The joy of youth is its consciousness of illimitable spaces; that blissful sense of far horizons and ample leisure, years upon years, in which to be discovered — sometime, somehow, somewhere.

Jerry did not ask, as yet, if he had found himself.

### II

The city where he lived —

And by the city I do not mean my own New York, nor yours, nor any one's. I mean Jerry's. I mean the city where the real Jerry lived and moved and had his being; in which, each morning, he arose from dreams to dreams, in that house which he had chosen for reasons, and which he saw with eyes, that were his own. They were, of course, literary reasons. Dickens, who, according to the weather, makes old houses smile or frown at will, and even weep upon occasion, after the fashion of these human habitations in which we dwell, helped Jerry to select his boarding-house. It must not be imagined that he had taken my advice, and come

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down into the present yet. But he was coming, slowly. He had crossed the ocean, though he could not be induced to stay, and, in fact, at this period of his life, was dividing his time pretty equally between the old world and the new. Dickens, as I say, was with him when he chose his lodgings, but — a hopeful sign — Washington Irving was also of the party, and the three of them, arm in arm, wandered up and down until they found that dear old-fashioned rattletrap. In short, Jeremy was in United States history at last. It is true that he was not very far advanced in it as yet, but when one considers the long road that he had come — all the way from that golden Elizabethan age in the hay-fields of Toodlumshire — he may be said, I think, to have made a most amazing progress. And now that he had gone so far as to take lodgings in the new world — in so much of it at least as was still antique enough to seem a part of that old world in which he was a loyal subject of his Queen — I began to hope that he would yet be naturalized.

I believe I used a word just now that was hardly warranted. This is not my story. And if I so far forgot myself, or rather, if I so far forgot my hero as to use my own eyesight instead of his, it is my duty to retract. I retract “rattletrap.” It was a lovely

## A STRANGER IN OUR MIDST 35

old-fashioned mansion in which Jerry dwelt, with a wistaria vine upon its curious portico. A modern critic might have objected that the paint had peeled. But who would take a critic's word against a poet's? To do so would be the death of literature. It was all in your eye whether the paint had peeled or not. The portico was there, and it was still genteel enough for a poet to emerge from it, pulling on his worn kid gloves as carefully as if he had not been going to the patent-whalebone place at all (and he was *not*); as if, indeed, his appointment was with Nat Willis, or to purchase tickets for the Battery concert, to hear the new singer, Jennie Lind.

The beauty of living thus in whatever year one chooses from the past — or in several years at once, in the most delectable confusion of fragrant names and romantic dates — is indescribable. When spring came, all the springtimes of half a century were sweetly blended for Jerry Ladd. Imagine the intoxication! At such times, lingering in the sweet old squares—Chelsea, or Washington, or Gramercy Park — he was beside himself with the romance of life, and even shed tears on one occasion. To peer through the tall iron fence in Chelsea, listening to the chapel chimes, and watching the discreet young seminarians pass by in caps and

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gowns, under the ivied walls, was all too much for the composure of a man who had — the tenses are a little difficult to manage — who had studied *to have gone* to Oxford.

Once, too, the children playing in Gramercy Park stuck for a moment in his throat, he had stepped so suddenly from the unreality of modern times, where his presence at all was due to some question about patent whalebone, into the very middle of a Victorian novel by a man named Thackeray. And to come *home* so unexpectedly, and find one's self again among those innocent and lovely faces! . . .

It was all very tender, and a little sad. Time was flying, and the world, each day, somehow, was growing stranger to him. Often now he was not himself. He never could be sure that around the corner somebody else's New York might not run plump into him. And then it would be blocks, perhaps, before he could arouse himself sufficiently to realize that what had just now startled him was but a nightmare after all, and that in reality he was safe and sound, a hundred years ago!

### III

We were sitting in an old tavern with sand upon the floor, and with our chops a-broiling on fiery racks

## A STRANGER IN OUR MIDST 37

under our very eyes, for it was pay-day, and this, as Jerry informed me, was the only eating-place in all New York. It was the very last! And what folks would do when it was gone, certainly *he* was not the man to say. It was beyond his imagination.

Across our mugs of ale his face was beautiful to behold. I had never seen him more at ease, not even in Toodlumshire; nor had ever heard him talk more eloquently. The coach, I fancy, had just come in with old Weller on the box, and what with the stir and talk, and the smoke of meats, and the sizzling at the fire, Jeremy was in his element. It was a raw day, and the tavern snugness was very comforting.

There was, at first, a stranger at our table who appeared to be interested in Jerry's talk.

"You look happier than most New Yorkers," he remarked as he finished his dessert. "Give *me* Chicago."

I was much amused at Jerry's face. In fact I was a little doubtful that he had ever so much as heard of Chicago. Certainly he spoke it with an absent air.

"Chicago . . . But Chicago, somehow, doesn't mean anything to me. It hasn't any — it hasn't any background, has it?"

The other laughed good-humouredly.

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"Plenty of foreground, though," he remarked as he pushed back his plate and lighted a cigar. And Jerry shook his head.

"I never cared much for foregrounds."

"What's your line?" the stranger asked.

"How?"

"I say, what's your *line?*"

"Oh!" and Jerry's face was something of a study. "Well, I'm — I'm in the clothes line, in a way, I suppose. Or pretty near it. Patent whalebone — for corsets."

It took courage for a poet to say that! His face flushed a little, which gave the stranger a chance to remark that he should hardly have expected that a corset-man would be so modest. And he added as he rose:

"That's why you're so fond of keeping in the background, eh? Well, that's right." He slapped Jerry on the shoulder, and winked at me. "That's right, my boy — where corsets are concerned. You shouldn't have even eyelets for the foreground!"

Jeremy had stiffened under the familiarity. He smiled faintly, but he said nothing until we were alone, and then there was a touch of weariness in his voice.

"It used to be brick, and they all had their little

## A STRANGER IN OUR MIDST 39

jokes about that. And now it's corsets. That's life, I suppose. Hello — a little banter about something that we don't give a tinker's damn for — and then, Good-bye! What do we *know* about each other?"

He shook his head.

"It's life, and it isn't life. It's not my life. I'm not a *corset-man*."

He uttered it with profound contempt. But presently his voice softened.

"I'd like to know *what* I am. I'd give a good deal to — find myself."

His eyes began to have that wistful look, which was the invariable sign in them of coming visions. Oh, he would find himself, I knew! In about three minutes he would be slipping back through the last century until he could hobnob with his own great-grandfather. And that was precisely what I had determined to prevent. I had come that day with the intention of talking plainly; for it was high time, I told myself, that he should stop this idle dreaming, and begin to live.

"Look here, old man," I said resolutely. "Now that you have condescended to spend five minutes in your own era, for heaven's sake stay here!"

I had caught him just in time. A moment later and

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that wistful look would have become the familiar happy trance from which I felt it my hard but solemn duty to rescue him. Instead, I had the satisfaction of seeing that waxing glamour in his eyes begin to wane again. He came back slowly, and painfully I must confess, into those harsh realities that I had sworn as a friend to make him face. It was hard, of course, to see the light grow dim, and the shadows lengthen in his eyes. But he must play the man.

"Now that you're here," I repeated, fixing him sternly with my own eyes lest he should again elude me, "now that you've actually come down into the present ——"

"Where they make their little jokes," he said. "Where I *am* a corset-man."

He smiled, but it was such a faint, sad, almost reproachful smile that I felt my heart begin to soften toward him, in the way it always did; and if I had not vowed that day to save him from his fatal lotus-eating I should have said no more.

"Why don't you *do* something?" I demanded. "Why don't you rise up and kick the dashboard into kindling wood? What right has a man like you, a man of your brains and heart, to peddle whalebone?"

His face fell. He uttered not a word as I went on,

## A STRANGER IN OUR MIDST 41

relentlessly, to point out the error of his ways. I poured out, literally, upon my best of friends, the vials of my wrath. And when I had proved to him, with all the rhetoric of youth, and with all the logic of my own experience among men, that he was doomed unless he roused himself from the folly of those lovely, lovely, but utterly unmarketable dreams — I felt better.

I cannot say so much for Jerry.

Poor lad! His whole frame drooped under my heated eloquence; and his ale — that good old English ale that was so nourishing to those false illusions that I had banished as I hoped forever — grew warm and flat in his pewter mug.

“Drink up!” I said, more heartily. “Let’s have a little Milwaukee beer, to — to change your luck. To celebrate your naturalization papers. Why, man, you are an American citizen! Think of that! A citizen of the most glorious republic the world has ever seen. Drink down old England, and we’ll drink up the U.S.A. You’re one of us.”

He shook his head.

“I’m not thirsty.”

“You’re not angry, I hope?”

“Oh, I can’t be angry,” he confessed. “It’s all true.”

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"Well, then, cheer up. What you want to do is go to writing. That's your bent."

"I *am* writing," he answered sadly. "I am always writing. But what difference does it make?"

I had never seen *this* Jeremy. And when I had tried for an hour, but all in vain, to soften the shocking effect that my words had wrought in him — that utter listlessness in which he listened; when all that I could say to rouse him to life again only plunged him deeper into that deathlike silence, I had to confess — though I did so prudently, to myself — that if the present was so fatal to him, to that virile radiance in which he had shone and sparkled until it intervened, it were better, perhaps, to get him back again as soon as possible into the glorious safety of the past.

"Waiter," I said, "bring us two Tobies of good old stout."

Jerry roused himself.

"No," he protested feebly, "let's have the beer."

And while it was coming I seized the opportunity to say as soothingly as possible:

"You have been unfortunate, old man, in your experiences with the present. That's all."

"Yes," he murmured. "They all come back."

"What do?"

## A STRANGER IN OUR MIDST 43

"The manuscripts."

"Oh, well, they're likely to at first," I told him. "But wait. Have patience. Why, man alive," I cried, striking the table with my fist, "the whole future is before you."

And as if by magic — at the mere word *future* — his face brightened!

"Ah," he said, a new light dawning in his eyes, "I know! I know!"

Before I was aware his coat-tails slipped, and vanished, from my grasp. There was no holding him. And I sat and stared! He had cleared the Present at a bound!

### IV

Past or Future — one or the other it had to be with him. He was at home in both. Only the Present was dark and strange to Jerry Ladd; and there, only, was he troubled or terrified by ghosts. For it was only flesh and blood that ever haunted him — the men of his own generation that made him quake with fear.

Never again did I attempt to rescue him, to bring him either up, or back, to date. And if I was forever losing him in that maze of crooked old-world lanes with which he was familiar — for he was always darting

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down strange alleyways of time, and turning queer old corners where I paused bewildered — we shared in common those forward vistas of life's young dream.

He showed me his rejected manuscripts. Secretly I shook my head at them, but openly and recklessly I urged him on to the expenditure of unknown sums in stamps, by which they travelled up and down, until, in time, encountering nothing but misadventures and rebuffs, they became such sorry-looking, ragged vagabonds that they did not dare to venture any more into the great high roads of literature, but slunk along unfrequented and miry byways, sleeping sometimes under the very hedges, exposed to the editorial elements. Thus, smudgy with tobacco ash and the drippings of nicotine, I have seen them since tied up in a melancholy bundle; and on a bit of paper slipped under the enclosing string I read in the familiar hand of the most hopeful man it ever was my lot to know:

*Possible Manuscripts. Preserved Against Future Reference or Publication.*

Their titles made a fragrant catalogue. There was:  
*A Country Lad* — some reverie, I suppose, of Tood-lumshire.

*The Eternal Legend* — young love, of course, and

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written when Huldah had become a mere legendary heroine herself.

*Drowsy Waters* — the river — the only river — the Toodlumshire Avon.

*Jewel Weed* — that is to say, the precious common things that bloom about us. The meditations of an old young man on the pursuit of happiness. The philosophy that youth holds instinctively, in its idealism; that maturity forgets, scoffs at; and that age comes back to, as the fairest harvest of its experience.

*A Whitsuntide Pastoral* — no need to say that this was in the days of Good Queen Bess, and that Jeremy and Huldah had gone a-maying. I assume that it was Huldah, though her name was Celia. It was a meadow love scene, so innocently simple that I doubt if there is a girl living could speak the maid's part in it out of her modern little head. Huldah might have done so, for in those days ragtime was not yet. Speech and song are as inseparable as ever. Our utterance is attuned to what is running in our heads, and we talk love in the measure and melody in which we sing it.

*The High Street at Lamplight* — Fifth Avenue in its fairest mood. Old York, to which he had come up by coach, out of the country, on a wet evening when the pavements shone.

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*Under the Eaves* — visions from that antique house in Chelsea; a prose fantasy in the manner of Jerry's Uncle Charles.

*May in Gramercy Park.*

*June in Maiden Lane.*

*July in Greenwich.*

*August* —

I forget where August was; but, wherever it was, it was hot and enervating, and by that time the other manuscripts had begun to look seedy with their incessant journeyings; and that fair springtime in which Jerry had come up to town seemed long ago. The August manuscript was never even finished, and what there was of it had nothing of that earlier bloom.

The titles, as one reads them now, are chapter-headings in their author's unwritten story — that golden legend of which mine is but the feeblest shadow. I call it a legend because, in my desire to catch the spirit of his life, I must so often forget its letter. Because, to be fair to him, and true — as to any of us, for that matter — one must write not merely under oath, but under the inspiration of a half-forgetfulness. Under revelations too — those revelations of glance and smile, and of a word here and a word there, caught in passing, and, after years perhaps, pieced

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together into a completed sentence that shall tell at last what once one could but partly guess. There are scenes here that I never witnessed, that I could not know, save in the mystery of those divinations that I would trust rather than my very eyes. And, intimate though they are, I dare to tell them because I know — yet cannot tell, always, *how* I know — that they are true.

### III

#### A PRACTICAL MAN

ONE morning Jeremy was waiting patiently in the outer office of a certain newspaper, seated solemnly, bolt upright, in a wooden chair, between the door and the desk of a little office-boy. The lad watched him out of a corner of one mischievous young eye, and in the intervals of duty appeared to Jeremy to be making game of him, by means of furtive nods and winks at another imp, whose sole business it was to loll upon his comrade's desk and grin perpetually. It was uncomfortable, like the chair; but not altogether unendurable for a man who sat in one world, but held his head high up in another, where office-boys were never even dreamed of.

"He'll never do," whispered the arch-imp, hoarsely; and the other nodded.

"Nope. You can see he ain't all there."

But Jerry looked at them and smiled. It was not the mere curving of the lips that caught them unawares.

It was that smile within a smile — the smile of the real Jeremy, who was, perhaps, so much a boy himself, though an old one, that he was irresistible. At any rate they both smiled back.

"Say," said the arch-imp confidentially, "we'll put you wise. Don't you be bluffed by anything He says" — indicating the inner door. "Just look Him in the eye."

Jerry nodded. It was good advice, however pertinent; and, as it happened, he was in need of counsel, for just when the Future had seemed most promising, and he had begun to live in it with heart and soul, the Present, with its customary dampness, had intervened. He was under a cloud. For the past four months he had been writing, writing, writing, at a story that was to take the world by storm — a novel, this was; and just when it was about to be completed, and he was composing not only its final chapters but the very language of the reviews that were to hail it as the "finest English prose that we have read in years," and just, too, when he was beginning to hold his head up, and look the very Present in its grimy face, the patent-whalebone people (not being in the secret of this unprecedented dignity) gave him a two weeks' notice releasing him from all further humili-

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tion at their hands. It was a petty incident, too small and sordid for Time to note. But Time did note it, however Eternity may view these foolish little questions of finance. The rosy Future turned quite pale, and fled to the horizon; and Jeremy, bewildered by the sudden darkness, was left alone where it was Now or Never, and where even the counsel of a friendly office-boy was comforting.

"Remember now; look Him in the eye!"

Jerry nodded, gulping hard as he stood at last before that Dreadful Presence — an Editor Enthroned!

He was a mortal-looking man; but like the monarch that He was, He sat in a mighty halo, partly of pipe-smoke and partly of His exalted state, so that Jeremy forgot himself, forgot all that he had been, forgot what some day he would be, when *bis* time came, the glorious but recreant Future that had deserted him in the hour of his need — and in answer to that Awful Voice replied meekly:

"I'm looking for a job."

"*What's that?*"

"I say I'm — I-looking for a job."

The royal head swayed dubiously. The royal eye was lighted by a baleful fire, and the royal voice was very sorry.

There *was* no job.

Then Jeremy remembered the kindly office-boy and looked Him in the eye.

"Perhaps you have a — g-ghost of a job?"

It was the ghost of a voice that said it, but it made Him look twice before he thundered, with the faintest glimmer of a smile:

"*And what may that be?*"

Jerry laughed. That is, he meant it for a laugh. It was really little more than a kind of hoarse grin.

"What *is* the ghost of a job?" demanded the Mighty One. The glimmer now had been extinguished, but Jerry did not even wink.

"The ghost of a job? Why — the privilege of h-haunting you," he explained. "You know what I mean — b-bringing you things to print."

The Monarch roared.

"Oh! That's all right," he said heartily. "Bring 'em along. Haunt away!"

"You p-pay, of course?" Jerry ventured, trying to restrain his joy.

"Sure! By the yard. What are you going to write about?"

"Well, for one thing, I thought I'd write about the — Streets of New York."

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Jerry's ears may have deceived him, but they recorded just the ghost of a royal groan.

"Do you want to know how many times the Streets of New York have been written up! Well, I'll tell you, young man. Just nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine times, to be exact."

"Not m-my Streets of New York," Jerry assured him.

"Humph! Perhaps not," the editor conceded, beginning to shuffle the papers on his desk. "Well, bring 'em along — *your* streets. But it's a wornout theme, and I can't give you any hope."

"Oh, I'll furnish the hope," Jerry told him, rapturously. "That's right in my line. And I have here," he confessed, beginning to take them from his pockets, "several manuscripts that I —"

The editor glanced at them, and laid them away from him as far as possible on his desk.

"Hope's in your line, is it?" he demanded sharply, lighting his pipe again.

"Y-yes, sir. You know what the old English ballad says, 'My face is my fortune, sir,' she said.' Well, Hope's mine."

The editor was silent. He gazed off thoughtfully, out of a very dirty window, at the elevated tracks,

## A PRACTICAL MAN

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where, now and then, a train rushed by. Seated thus, quietly, he did not appear so very terrible. In fact, Jeremy, with his instinctive sympathy for anything — man or beast, king or peasant — that gazed off wistfully into the distance, whether of the Future or the Past (and here it was the Past, he knew) felt his heart drawn to the royal meditant.

"Doubtless you began with a pretty fair inheritance of hope yourself," he ventured, feeling more at home now.

"Doubtless I did," was the gruff reply. "The fact is I"— and here his bulk began to heave with some secret and irresistible emotion — "I wrote up the Streets myself! Yes, sir. It was the very first thing I did when I came to town."

"And did they — did they p-print them?" Jerry inquired, cautiously.

"Oh," was the equally cautious answer, "they used a block or two, I guess."

"Well, history repeats itself," was Jerry's optimistic comment. "And I don't expect, of course, to confine myself to the Streets. There must be some wonderful stories in all this mob and uproar — if one can find them."

"Yep — if you can find 'em."

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"Things happen to you down here," Jerry remarked, remembering the patent-whalebone episode. "If one never finds a story here, one is apt to live one — and never know it, I suppose."

The editor shuffled his papers again, and Jerry rose.

"I mustn't keep you," he began —

"Oh, that's all right," the editor growled. "You've got to haunt me, of course. That's understood. That's the arrangement. But I don't know what it is — something or other — that ghost in you, I guess — reminded me of a fellow I used to know."

Jerry smiled. It was the same smile within a smile — the ghost in his smile — that had caught the office-boy.

"Yourself, perhaps?" he said, respectfully.

"Well — I used to think it was myself," the editor confessed. "But I don't know now. One either finds himself, or loses himself, down here. You may not know that I used to be a novelist."

"Oh!" cried Jeremy, for they were brothers now.  
"I should like to read some of your books."

The editor nodded.

"So should I!"

He smiled grimly, and with his blue pencil began.

to edit what was lying nearest in the clutter on his desk. It is the customary sign of royalty that the audience is at an end. Jerry withdrew.

"Did you look Him in the eye?" demanded the office-boy.

And Jerry nodded. It was a beautiful little office-boy, with wings. And it was a beautiful world that he descended to, floating down the staircase that he had climbed. For the Future had come back, blushing for its base desertion, and he was at last a Journalist. Or, if not quite a Journalist, he was, at least, the ghost of one.

## II

The Streets were declined. No reason was given either for the declination or for the thanks with which they were accompanied. Nor did Jerry ever seek one. But *Oxford Through the Fence* was accepted, cut down one half, and *Published* — the word demands a chapter by itself — published in the Saturday supplement — item \$4.66 in a brown paper envelope marked *Ladd*.

And that was the Beginning.

What Jerry saw the day that his *Oxford* appeared in print was one long beautiful vision extending from the news-stand where he bought it for himself to Wash-

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ington Square, whither he retired with it, almost in tears.

It was yet winter, and ice and snow lay on the ground; but a sudden mildness and radiant sunshine had suffused the Square as with a tender April haze. In its bloom outlines became indistinct — boughs seemed clothed in an impalpable fairy foliage, as if the spirit of the springtime already hovered there unseen. Hues and colouring were glorified — the white and gray of the majestic arch looming above the noisy traffic, the yellow of the memorial tower holding its cross aloft to the serene and cloudless blue, and the rose and white of the stately old-fashioned mansions, their red-brick faces flushed cheerfully with the morning sun. All objects shared in this transient halo; even the heaps of dirty snow, the ugly little park pagodas, and the dilapidated houses on the meaner side of the pleasaunce, outliving their residential usefulness, but lingering on, and beginning now to be frowzy with the signs of that encroaching Present which, all day long, roared about the Square, showing its teeth, and waiting hungrily for the time when all four sides — that fair and rosy one as well — should become its prey.

On the crossings, baby-carriages contended for the

right of way with carts and trucks, cabs and automobiles, and foreign-looking busses. The paths were full of playing children — children of the rich, with their gossiping nurses, and children of the poor with no one to chide or check their noisy gambols; while on the benches old men, waiting for their end, basked in the sunlight, blinking and smoking and muttering to themselves, as oblivious of the nursing bottles and the flying snowballs as of the sparrows feeding at their feet.

There were swarthy faces from an Italian colony close at hand, and others, pale and pinched with hunger and despair — they of that scattered nation of the homeless — staring blankly at the beauty of another futile day. And, now and then, fairer faces passed from the rosy houses to cushioned vehicles waiting at the curb. On every side the same commingling of opposing elements — old and new, native and alien, commerce and home, wealth and poverty, youth and age, memories and hopes — while over all presided the great white arched memorial of the silent and immutable Past, over-shadowing the clamorous and ever-changing Present. The Future only — like those premonitions of the spring transfiguring the winter's morning — was a doubtful and elusive presence in the Square. But it was there — not merely nursed

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and watched and guarded, but all unseen and unsuspected and alone. And nowhere was it half so real, or so supremely beautiful, as where a young man sat, solitary, upon a bench, smiling blissfully to himself, with a morning paper in his hands.

### III

Thus Jeremy came out of the old romance into the new. From living backward to living forward. And, as always, the interim was but a strip of foreground from which the eye pressed on eagerly to the enchanted distance, which was now of the future, where it had been, formerly, of the past.

The present provided, to be sure, a ten-cent bottle of ink, a tablet of white paper, and a window in a hall bedroom which had, for mere common eyes, a vista of a very lean and frugal heaven, where the clouds hung low sometimes, and were caught and tethered with wooden clothes-pins. And it yielded him, besides, shelter and a pallid sustenance consisting of what there is only one word to fittingly describe — victuals. But what were victuals to Jerry Ladd? Truth to tell, he would always rather talk than eat; and considering his boarding-place it was well, perhaps, that this was so.

When not talking he was sitting at his window

scratching away at what mostly came to naught; and the remainder came to little enough, so far as this world was concerned. On the other it fed a growing Fame. Right through the clothes line Jerry saw it glow by day, until it filled, all golden, that strip of sky; by night it sparkled there, a thousand tapers lighting up the dark for him, as he leaned his head against the pane.

It was then, sometimes, that he remembered his forgotten prayers, addressing them to the gracious Mystery of that illumined distance. Sometimes, as if in answer, the lights so dazzled him, or swam so strangely in his eyes, that he was forced to close them. Oftener there seemed to be no sign whatever that he was heard, or that it was even known There that the manuscript sent off that day *must not* come back — that Here it was the eleventh hour of necessity, and poor, weak human frailty could do no more!

A little lower than the angels, there was, across the yards, a high room like his own, where on the eaves-ledge a pot of geraniums bloomed by day, the glimmer of a lamp by night. The room was occupied by a girl. She was seldom to be seen and then only when she leaned for a moment over her scarlet treasure. That her features were vaguely youthlike was all that he

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ever could distinguish, but he used to muse and imagine things about her; and it pleased him to think that she was fair, and that even in New York, and doubtless in poverty as well, she cherished in her heart old-fashioned cottage-thoughts, like the flowers on her sill. In time she became the heroine of his more idyllic themes, which made him wonder, sometimes, what she would have said, could she have known. Ladlike, he even plotted romantic little episodes, in which her unconscious influence and inspiration in a young man's life were suddenly revealed to her, to her amazement and confusion, in which her cheeks became the colour of her geranium. It seemed a pity that in her loneliness she never would even dream that she had cheered and brightened another solitude. It never occurred to Jeremy, I am sure, that any one might be watching him — that his own life, seemingly so obscure and futile, illumined others from afar; or even those that it touched in passing. Certainly, he never dreamed that any one would write these lines of him. But, youthlike, he did resent the barriers of custom and of circumstance that kept him from sharing those shadowy lives that lingered near or flitted past his own; and some notion of what the spirit-land would be, of its beautiful freedom and its untrammelled sympathy — the real Jeremy

and those other real ones, released at last, so that there would be no longer any need for loneliness — brought to his musings a compassion for his fellow-prisoners that he had never felt before; so that even the despised and rejected Present, in its lights and shadows, and its subtle colourings, began to have a beauty of its own.

But — alas for any living in it! — it was always disappointing him. It was always intervening in the old, hard, wall-like fashion, between him and those fairer vistas of his hopes. It was only meant apparently for the so-called Practical Man, who dwelt there comfortably — on the very ground that had been won for him by the foolish dreamers of the past!

"Ladd," said the editor one day, "there's one nice thing about your contributions."

Jerry flushed. It was not often that a crumb of praise fell to him from that full table where the practical men were dining sumptuously every day.

"Yes, sir, there's one nice thing about the things you write. They can go into the paper, or into the waste-basket. If we leave them out we shan't be scooped by any other sheet. And if we put them in — well, that doesn't matter either."

A practical man would have known what to reply at once, but it was some moments before Jeremy could

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find his tongue. And then it was only to say, as he sat there softly tearing into bits the manuscript that he had brought with him that morning:

"It matters to me."

### IV

Jerry's mother had gone back, long ago, to Tood-lums, which she had never really left, and so there was no one to notice his bewildered face when he returned that day from his visit to the editor. It was a crisis in his life. And it was many a darkened hour before his thoughts began to flow again to any purpose, out of the confusion into which they had been plunged.

One thing was clear — he was done with dreaming. There was to be no more reverie in his life. No more star-gazing. No more appointed trysts in moonshine, where he was always waiting for what never came.

He would *face* the Present.

And he would face it, not as a dreamer any longer, but as a practical man. As a *practical man!* He would put aside childish things. Youth also, and its bravado, and its illusions. And the Past, and the Future — they were non-existent. He would renounce

them all! And henceforth and forever he would dwell in the world that he could feel, and see, and hear, and smell, and taste, in each moment as it passed.

And, as a practical man, that world would claim him as its own — for better, or for worse. And if for worse, why then, at least, he would have lived, not merely dreamed.

Perhaps this also was a dream — disguised.

But if it was a dream, there was as yet no sign of it. He was in earnest, terribly in earnest, now. Now, and Here.

"If one is ever to be practical," he told himself, "one must begin *at once*."

And he began at once!

Then and there, seated in his hall bedroom, he began life over again.

It is safe to say that no one ever went about a reformation in a manner more ideally businesslike. He rose suddenly — something within him lifting him to his very feet — and literally kicked his past out of the window, where it vanished somewhere among those stars where it belonged.

Then he lighted the lamp, for he had been brooding in the dark, and with one sweep of his hand cleared his table of every vestige of his dream — every finished

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page and scribbled note — and seated himself before a clean white sheet of paper.

"In the first place," he told himself, rapping himself to order, as it were — resolving his assembled wits into a committee of the whole, with his will as chairman; and, without any further preliminaries, plunging at once into the heart of the business — "in the first place, we have got to have a steady income."

There was no dissent.

"And to have a steady income," he continued, in the same cool, calculating, inevitable tone of thought — without a tremor of the old emotion, without a shadow of doubt or hesitation or any fear whatever, for all such follies he had put behind him with his past, and he was Master now — "to have a sure, safe income, always, as long as one shall live, the best way is to go into business."

The silence was unanimous.

"But not into any fly-by-night business," he warned himself. "Not into any doubtful venture, or high-tension enterprise, at the mercy of the wind and weather. Not into the stock market. (The stock market was then and there eliminated.) Nor into any passing whim or novelty. (This was a rap at patent whalebone, which had already been eliminated.)

"No," Jeremy continued calmly, "what we want is some good old staple line founded on Necessity. And, in particular, a concern old enough to have raised itself into the sight of men — flourishing enough to afford a refuge in its spreading foliage, and with its roots down deep in the cool, moist regions of the solid earth. (That was to say, of course, safe deposit vaults. And in his reference to "a refuge in its spreading foliage," Jerry had in mind something like the India House, where his Uncle Charles Lamb worked so long, and came at last into a pension.)

"And why not?" he asked, still speaking as a practical man. "When one is choosing one's house (and of course one *does*) why not choose one with a past? History repeats itself. (Now that was true — that very moment history was repeating itself.) A house with a victorious past is the best assurance of a victorious future. And besides" — here, it must be confessed, Jeremy forgot himself; it was the shadow of his own past sneaking back from its banishment among the laughing stars — "besides, there is a certain charm, even romance, in an ancient and honourable institution. Commerce, also, has its Oxfords!"

There was a sudden stir in the committee. A kind

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of thrill ran through its members, and an instant later would have broken into a tumult of applause. But Jerry checked it with a frown.

"It may take longer for a man to rise in such a house," he sharply reminded them, "but once there, one has the assurance that there will always be — always at least in his own lifetime — something to rise *to*. And slowly, but surely, in such a place faithful service will find reward."

Oh, there could be no doubt of that. On that point the whole committee was a unit, and Jeremy went on triumphantly to point the way to this accomplishment of so prudent and practical a design. It was to be furthered not in the usual haphazard fashion (to wit, advertisement), but by one long, grim, protracted siege of those ivied walls that he had in mind. For even mills are muffled, sometimes, in a leafy mantle beautiful with time.

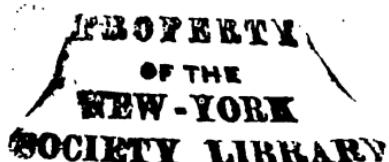
One must *choose* his citadel of trade — that was the first point — and then lay siege to it; and then — which was more important even than the vines — one *never must give up!* Never until one found some foothold, though it be the humblest, on that lowest floor. Some errandry, perhaps, or wrappery, or even sweepery, from which one would rise in time to higher things.

That was the programme, and the entire committee voted it a go.

Well, then, *which* house? That was the next consideration. And it was one that would require some time. Haste, obviously, was to be avoided in a venture that involved a man's whole future life. The thought of that — and it was a solemn thought, and suffused the committee with a kind of suppressed but tremulous excitement — caused even Jeremy to pause. He had never realized before that the business world could be so spiritually exalting! And more than once, as he paced the floor — his chair had proved a bit confining — he had to calm himself with the reminder that, above all things, a practical man must never, even in a crisis, lose his head.

Which house, then? — That was the question. There were so many in the world, it seemed at first impossible to choose. But, as every practical man is well aware, every question, however vast, is vertebrate; that is to say, is to be solved upon some simple principle — its bony skeleton, on which its bulk depends.

The principle here was that of Choice. When one can choose at all, one chooses, naturally, what is most congenial. There was no earthly reason, then, no practical reason, why one, for example, should choose



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a business that smelled to heaven or that had any other disagreeable — however venerable — concomitant. Certainly not when there were others in the world, equally old, or famous, or well-rooted in the “solid earth,” that were inoffensive — and even some that must be highly pleasing — to the senses. There would be no occasion for accusing a man of being *un-practical*, because he elected to sweep out an ancient and honourable manufactory of — let us say — frankincense and myrrh, the aromatic perfumes and spices of Araby, or the nutritious chocolate or fragrant coffees of our fairer walks of commerce; or (if such things pall in time), silver, or silks, or books, or linens, rather than a hoary old tannery, for example, or an old-established, even vine-clad, pharmaceutical establishment, bottling up smells from every corner of the odoriferous globe. Not at all. Nor was there any really practical reason for selecting fish, or glue, or grease, or coffins, in preference say to wine, with its ancient and idyllic lineage; or even to so homely a commodity as flour — which, though dusty it is true, has still a pure white, altogether chaste and wholesome association with the sunny fields and granaries of the world, from Joseph’s time, or Ruth’s, till now.

No; one could still be practical and not forswear

the poetry of life. Indeed, the more he thought of it, the clearer Jerry's vision grew — of that epic commerce in which it was still man's privilege to embark upon romantic seas, as adventurously, as heroically, as ever, dipping his very hands into the things that poets only catalogue.

Which line, then, should it be?

Not books. It would be well, perhaps, to avoid even the appearance of literature! And, on general principles, to select a merchandise not too elusive; whose address was already known. Spices of Araby are boxed up — where? Heaven only knows; the billboards do not; nor the newspaper advertisements. But of the others . . . of them all, perhaps . . . yes, on the whole he preferred, he thought, as a practical man . . . and there were many considerations in its favour, both practical and poetic . . . and, moreover, a certain *leaning* as it were, that was purely psychical, and not to be divined; but no less creditable on that account — *Chocolate*.

It was not merely that he was fond of chocolate. Nor that his mother might have had some qualms about the wine trade. Nor simply that chocolate was a neat commodity, or one that was moral and nutritious — notoriously nutritious; nor that its savour

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and flavour were, esthetically speaking, so unobjectionable. These were good reasons, but superficial, all of them. There were other and profounder ones that touched the question at its very core. Business reasons. Reasons that would appeal at once to a practical man like Jerry Ladd. (J. Ladd he was to sign himself thereafter.)

Chocolate had "come to stay." It was, therefore, a safe investment for a man who expected to put all his eggs in one basket — risk his whole life, body and mind and soul, in exchange for a steady income. Chocolate, so to speak, was in the flower of its commercial youth; while tea and coffee, on the other hand, were growing seedy. In a nervous age they had lost both their glamour and alas! their reputation. Things were being said of them. The respectable eyed them askance; the learned glared at them — recommending chocolate! Chocolate — it took but one glance of a business eye to see — had a future without a single cloud, moral or scientific, upon its fair horizon. And as for its present, where, in the universe of trade, was the shelf or counter so remote, or so unfrequented, that the dust ever settled, or the spider ever wove its web, on a box of chocolate?

Which house, then? — for it was only the line that

the committee had agreed upon, without a murmur: it was all so logical and conclusive as presented by a practical man! Which firm? Their names were legion. Which citadel of chocolate was to be stormed and carried by assault? Which cocoa-tree was to be climbed? — well-rooted, and affording in its spreading foliage a roost and refuge for this Lieutenant Buonaparte of finance.

The committee hesitated — this was not a matter for the public ear — and the doors were shut, excluding the biographers. Among them, however, was a budding novelist, who carried in his mind a keyhole through which the very deaf might hear. He knows, but may not say, which house it was. But it was a good house, flourishing in the sight of men; and its roots were all that could be desired, even by the most conservative investor. It was the house whose cocoa Mother used to make — the Very Best, of course — Pure and Unadulterated. Oh, you may be sure of that. And when the doors were opened, and the biographers rushed in again, there was J. Ladd, seated at his table in the most businesslike manner in the world — not biting at his pen, dreamerlike, but *dictating!* — his Application.

It was an idyl! Neat of phrase, compact, a very compendium of information, so lucid in what it said

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and so suggestive of all that it in modesty withheld, that a busy business man, with one sweep of his distracted eye, might visualize the applicant. Completely visualize him: his lusty youth; its derivation from morally reliable and socially patriotic sources; its amiable readiness for *any* service however humble; its smiling patience founded on unblemished faith in a future where not a broom-stroke or a hammer-blow would be forgotten, but all, in due course of time, would be rewarded; and not a word about the stipend! All that, and more! so that he must have been a very duffer of a chocolate manufacturer who would not have cried at once:

"By Jove! The very man! This is the chap we have been looking for!"

It was indeed an idyl; and when at last Jeremy had drafted it afresh, and addressed the envelope, weary with so much business all at once — for one has to grow accustomed to being practical — but happy now, and once more hopeful, feeling his feet upon the solid earth and his head aloft in the very heaven of the Present, he dropped his letter into the nearest post-box. And then, feeling hungry, as in the Present one is apt to do, for it was midnight, he slipped into an all-night lunch-room across the way, for a cup of —

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## IV

### BARBARA

O PPOSITE Jeremy, across the tapioca pudding, sat one of the young ladies of the boarding-house, whose cheerful countenance had been a light to him in downcast moods. It was a plain face, but appeared always to be concealing something beautiful. Something, however, that eluded vigilance; a presence that was forever escaping through the open doorways of her eyes, and lingering playfully about her lips, and that hushed her voice, so that, however commonplace her words might be, there was always an undermessage in them that could be very tender and consoling.

Before he was aware, he found himself expecting her each evening, for it was seldom otherwise that they chanced to meet, and turning to her with a sense of refuge from shadowy and uncertain things. There was nothing doubtful about Barbara; nothing tense — nothing belated or bewildered, or incomplete. It was

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always quiet there where she was; as if, the day's work over, to-morrow could be entirely trusted to arrive on time, and with its usual luggage, which she never lifted in advance. Like Jerry's mother, she had for him a homely philosophy that, manlike, he was bound to smile at, but that, manlike also, he liked to lean upon sometimes.

"You are tired, that's all. Never mind; it will all come right. I *know* it will."

Easy to say; but not so easy to believe. And Barbara *believed* — there was never any doubt of that. If she had not, he never could have found such comfort in those simple phrases, which are the hardest in the world for hypocrisy or artifice to utter feelingly, they are so inane, until one hears them ring and echo with the voice of faith. That he did find comfort in them, and inspiration, was proved sufficiently by the radiance that, little by little as they talked, always came back into his face.

Barbara was a typewritist in a lawyer's office, somewhere downtown, where she must have been a prize, for her calm speech was in itself an affidavit of efficiency. She was one of those women who never swerve, never lapse, and who pass, unwearied and unsmirched, through rough or miry ways, as if predestined to such

goodness. Or, as if beloved of angels, they move always in the safe bright shadow of unseen wings. There was nothing lurking in Barbara's eyes, which, like the eyes of children, looked straight at Jeremy in a steadfast innocence, whose visions, doubtless, were like his own.

"Suppose there *are* two hundred on the waiting-list," she told him. "Chocolate, you know, is not the only business in the world. Have you tried an advertisement?"

He had not. It was such a haphazard method of beginning one's career. It was going into business blindfolded. In the end, however, Jeremy listened to her advice, and spent another practical evening, the fruit of which was this very plain, businesslike appeal.

A young man, country-bred, with a certain variety of experience, and literary qualifications, and with ideals of loyalty and diligence, desires a connection, however humble, with an established house, where he may have an opportunity to obtain a sound commercial training with hopes of an advancement. Address "Perseverance," *Bulletin*.

"It is beautiful," she told him, when he submitted it next day for her approval. "Beautifully worded."

And then she held it musingly in her hands.

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"Well," Jerry explained, modestly, "it is the simple truth. It has that to commend it. And it brings up, I think — don't you? — a certain picture before the mind? So that — so that the *wrong* person would hardly be likely to answer it."

"Yes," she acknowledged gravely, "I think that's true. It has too — too refined a sound for the *wrong* person to reply to it."

"I did take pains with it," he acknowledged, flushing with pleasure. "I wanted it to be myself, so far as possible, so that if I were not the kind of a man that was wanted they would know it at a glance, without my troubling them to send for me. I wanted, don't you see, from the very first — even in the advertisement — to start *fair*."

"Oh, you will!" she murmured, lifting her eyes, and regarding him almost with reverence. "You'll start fair."

She was silent a moment, and then — some sense of duty coming to the surface of her mood — she roused herself.

"I wonder," she began gently, "if it wouldn't be wise, perhaps, to omit the 'variety of experience,' and the 'literary qualifications'? They are true, of course; but business men, you know, are apt to be suspicious

of the word 'literary.' And, to *them*, 'a variety of experience' might suggest, don't you think, that you . . . never stuck long at anything?"

"But I signed it *Perseverance*, you notice?" Jeremy replied.

"Y-yes. That's so. But don't the two suggestions conflict somewhat? And wouldn't it be better," she ventured boldly, "to omit them both — with the 'literary qualifications'?"

"Omit them *all!*"

"Yes! *I* would. And sign your initials, as if, don't you see, you had nothing to conceal, even from your friends, who might guess from them what you were about. And as for the 'ideals of loyalty and diligence,'" she added, thoughtfully, "well they, of course, are presupposed. At least no hard-headed business man is going to take any stock in *them* until they had been demonstrated."

"How much does that leave?" Jerry inquired.

"And I'd take out the 'humble,' too," she advised him. "Really! Humility, you know, is not an asset in New York. Oh, not at all! It's all the other way. And the 'country-bred.' It doesn't matter where one is bred, so long as one —"

She hesitated, but she said it so demurely that even

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a young man with "literary qualifications" could hardly have objected to the phrase:

"So long as one — delivers the goods."

"And does that," Jeremy inquired again meekly,  
"I-leave anything?"

"Oh, yes! Have you a pencil?"

It took her but a minute — two at most.

"A young man," she read aloud, while the pencil was still busy, "desiring a commercial training, seeks employment in a well-established house; and, in the hope of subsequent advancement, is willing to begin his service without pay. *J. L., Bulletin.*"

"Does it leave *that!*" Jeremy exclaimed.

"All that!" she answered quaintly, with just the glimmer of a smile. "You can read it for yourself."

And then, at his complete bewilderment, she began to laugh softly. Still he gazed at her, and not at all at the revision which she had handed him.

"My!" he said. "And one wouldn't dream of it, to look at you!"

She was grave at once.

"Wouldn't dream what?" she asked.

"Why — that you could be so *practical!*"

Barbara smiled. But her face flushed, and all her quickness and precision vanished instantly.

"It is something one has to be, sometimes," she confessed, slowly lowering her eyes. "Not what one wants to be . . . I don't like — practical women!"

It was the first time that he had ever seen her on the verge of tears. And it had all come about so suddenly, so strangely — he could not quite remember how, nor make out why, nor what was signified — nor how to comfort her. Praise and gratitude were of no avail.

But he sent her advertisement.

## II

The only question had been that of pay, but it all came out as she predicted — that the established houses, like that of chocolate, were hardly in need of men; and that the main thing, in so general an advertisement, was to win the attention and capture the imagination at a single glance.

"Nothing in the world," she contended, "is so convincing of a man's sincerity, as his willingness to work without pay."

The answers were few and disappointing. Not one from the vine-clad Oxfords of commerce! But each of them, in lieu of an historic past, offered him a modest salaried present, arched by a gorgeous rainbow, with

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a pot of gold at the other end. Jerry shook his head at them, and Barbara herself confessed that they were not, in root or foliage, all that could be desired — but they were a beginning. And having, as it were, consecrated himself to the practical life, they agreed that it was not for him "to reason why," but to charge valorously, and leave the outcome to the higher powers.

He chose, therefore, after the most careful consideration, what seemed to be the least objectionable — the offer of a mysterious agency, which had at least the merit of promising fresh air, its office being on the eighteenth floor. His duties were those of a solicitor of advertising for some kind of novel pocket-calendar, pencil attached. It was a branch office, one of several, it appeared, in divers cities, the parent stem flourishing in Chicago, with a root-system that had not as yet suffered any drought. The agent, moreover, was a brotherly man. A hearty, generous fellow, who would not hear of employing without pay a youth of such self-sacrificing worth, and who offered Jerry, to begin with, ten dollars a week — a purely nominal salary, he explained, to be increased, from time to time, in proportion to the sales of space in the little book.

At the end of a week Jeremy appeared, to Barbara's inquiring eye, to have something on his mind. Just what, she was unable to conjecture; and she refrained from questioning him. But at the end of the second week, the burden, whatever it had been, and been removed, and Jerry, to her great relief, appeared himself again.

"Well?" she said, her heart warming at the sight of his radiant face across the table. "How does the work go?"

"Go?" he repeated. "It's gone!"

"*Gone!*"

"Oh, yes. Why ——"

He shook his head, and smiled derisively.

"I've never pretended to be a business man, but it took me a week, just one week," he declared proudly, "to sound that enterprise, so far, at least, as I'm concerned."

"Was it a — a fake?" Barbara inquired.

"No-o-o; I wouldn't say that. Not a fake. The concern's all right, so far as I know. And the scheme's all right. Nothing important, of course; but nothing wrong about it. And the agent is a right nice chap. But he doesn't know anything about *business*."

"What do you mean?"

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"Why, simply this: there isn't enough work for two men — that's all."

"Isn't enough work!"

"Why, no. One man can manage the whole agency — manage the office and do the soliciting as well. As a matter of fact there isn't any office-work worth mentioning. The soliciting's the thing. It all depends upon that. And all he did was to sit there and read the newspaper, and draw his salary, while I went out and got the advertisements. Why, as I showed him, there wasn't any earthly reason why he should be employing me — or any other man. Not the faintest shadow of an excuse! He could do the work — *all* the work — and save the company the expense. *My* job, I told him frankly, was simply a piece of useless extravagance; and I thought the company ought to know about it."

Barbara gasped.

"And what did *he* say to that?" she asked. She had forgotten her dinner.

"Say! What *could* he say? It was perfectly clear. So plain that I don't understand how it never had occurred to him."

"And what did you decide to do about it?" Barbara inquired nervously.

"What *could* I do? There was only one honourable thing *to* do — considering the interests of the house. I resigned."

"*Resigned!*"

"Why, yes. I couldn't expect *him* to resign, you know."

"And was he willing?"

"Oh, yes. He seemed willing. He didn't say much; but then the matter had been presented so very plainly he *couldn't* say much, considering the interests of the house.

"But considering *your* interests," Barbara reminded Jeremy, "what are you going to do? — now?"

"Well," he replied frankly, "I haven't had time to think of that yet. I don't know. What would *you* do?"

Barbara considered. Her face was a study. There was a shadow there that he never had seen before. It was as if, somehow, she had met at last a problem that even her calm and sanguine temperament was not quite sure of solving; a problem that carried with it a responsibility such as she had never been called upon to assume before. And as nothing could be decided then, the shadow lingered, and in the days that followed deepened from that first perplexity to care. She had known his mother at the boarding-

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house, and the thought of her concern for her only son, and of that son's strange, solitary figure in the world about him, aroused the mother in herself. Somehow, without her knowing it, it had become a duty to befriend him; and thus, without his knowing it, Jeremy became the burden not only of a woman's thoughts, but of her very prayers.

### III

Meanwhile Jeremy, as the next best thing to being practical, was polishing his neglected novel, through which his former love, the river, flowed; and of which the hero was a poor young bookkeeper in a lumber yard. Chapter by chapter he was showing it to Barbara, who said to him one Sunday afternoon, as they sat together in a corner of the parlour, where they chanced to be alone, "You know, *I* think that, for some people, being *unpractical* is the most practical thing in the world!"

"Just what do you mean by that?" he asked, looking up from his manuscript.

"Why, I mean just this: that, for some people, being unpractical is just — well, minding their own business! And that," she added, "is the most practical thing I know."

"And so," he answered, "you think ——"

"Yes, I do!" she interposed. "I think that for you to try to be a hard-headed business man is as foolish and far-fetched as for a hard-headed business man to set himself up as a poet, for example: as an author."

"But do you really think," Jerry began —

"Yes," she assured him. "I do! You are an artist, a dreamer. And you have no business trying to be anything else."

He flushed gratefully. If he remembered, afterward, that a kind young woman is not necessarily a literary critic, he remembered, also, that woman is famed for her intuition, which amounts sometimes to prophetic vision; and that the public is not made up of critics, after all, but of "gentle readers," like Barbara. Moreover, though he could not know it at the time, his own case was exceptional in this — that it isn't every young literary man whose first work is considered prayerfully.

Barbara insisted that she was right. That she *knew* he was an author! And at the waving of that wand of faith, which is the truest magic in the world, Jerry's old visions began to come back again, and faster and faster, until his fair young dream of life was there before his very eyes — incarnate! Again it

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smiled at him, bravely, and a little roseate of cheek, and spoke to his very heart, in a voice all tremulous with earnestness, so that which was his dream, and which was Barbara, he could not say!

"It won't be easy," the voice reminded him. "But, then, what road *is* easy? Not even a business man's, you know. Why, I heard Mr. Penningwell" — Mr. Penningwell was a former employer of Barbara — "say once, to a junior member of the firm, a nice young man, but a little self-satisfied with their prosperity, 'Oh, it's all very well,' he said, 'for you to sing, my boy. Your nest was feathered for you. You don't know of the days when I have gone down on my knees to bankers, pleading with them for just twenty-four hours more! Nor of the nights when I've gone home feeling that the end had come, and that our doors would close upon the morrow!' You have your panics too," the voice continued, addressing Jeremy. "But, then, that's life, isn't it? — weathering the storm, with the ship leaking?"

Jeremy was stirred. What a junior partner Barbara would have made! Imagine her — Jeremy could imagine her — down on her knees to Fate! And he could imagine Fate, under the circumstances!

"I shouldn't want everything ready-made, for me,

if I were a man," the voice confided. "Because, then, I wouldn't be apt to *be* a man, would I?"

Jerry thought not.

"And don't you adore storms! Watching, hoping, believing, *fighting!*"

Oh, yes! Jerry did — seeing once more the poetry of it all. Looking into those two brave, shining eyes he felt that there was nothing in life so noble, so exalting, so divinely beautiful, as Battle.

"Victory or not!" the voice exclaimed, softly.

True! It was not a question of victory. It was a question of —

"Playing the man!" the voice reminded him.

Yes, that was it! It was wonderful how his old thoughts — that old idealism which, he shuddered to think, he had so recently renounced forever — were being said for him. And by the very Spirit, a very angel, of the Present, whose voice was like an echo out of that deserted Past.

"I shall remember, I shall never forget," he told her gratefully, "that it was you who rescued my old dream for me!"

"You will remember," she answered, "that there was a girl, once, living in a boarding-house."

"No, no!" he protested. "I shall remember more,

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far more, than that." It would be a pity if kindness such as hers should be unrequited, fame's junior partner dwelling in obscurity! "You will see. I shall dedicate a book to you."

"More likely," she replied, "you will put me into one, as a minor character."

"I'll make you a heroine."

"You'll be foolish if you do," she warned him. "People will say, 'Why, she's no heroine! She might be anybody!' You have to be Somebody to be a heroine."

"Ah," Jeremy exclaimed, "but anybody *is* Somebody — to Somebody Else!"

And just then the bell rang for tea. It is the way with bells, just when the Present is becoming interesting. Just when the Past, too, had been restored to him, as beautiful as ever. Oh, yes, it was as beautiful as ever . . . but he saw it now as a lovely background, for a fairness that was very near.

### IV

And she was right, he told himself. He had tried to be something that he was not. Hereafter, he would be unpractical to his heart's content. He would mind his own business.

Under the spell of this decision he worked manfully at his novel, which, chapter by chapter, as he revised it, Barbara copied for him upon her typewriter. It would be good practice, she explained. And then, feeling somehow that it was an explanation that should be explained, she added hastily,

"I might have to do that kind of work some day."

And as this also might seem to require elucidation, she said frankly that she had thought something of setting up in business for herself.

This made things clear, though it did not account for her indignation when Jeremy proposed to pay. She was curiously sensitive about these business matters. When Jeremy promised her all his manuscripts, which, he hinted, might be considerable if he continued to compose as flowingly as he was writing then — about 365,000 words a year — she only smiled. But when he continued to find diversion in figuring *her* profits from his pen, at the usual rate for literary copying; and in picturing her frantic efforts to realize her share — her bills and duns, and his subtle makeshifts for eluding them by means of "literary" answers, poems to her typewriter, first editions of his work, fire-escapes, trap-doors, etc. — her silence became eloquent enough, and put an end to such commercial themes.

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She began indeed to be more reticent upon every subject. He became aware of a shadow upon their comradeship. Just what it was he could not say, but it was there — as if, suddenly, their little golden day had grown self-conscious, and knew, in twilight, that it was doomed to pass.

Then came the time when the work was done at last, and submitted to the publishers. The suspense was ominous. Jeremy was eager, yet afraid, to get his mail. He complained of a sinking feeling, somewhere, he thought, "about his gizzard." Trolley cars made him strangely seasick; long sea-voyages, on the contrary, to Staten Island, acted as restoratives; but all cures failed when he approached the boarding-house and remembered what might be waiting for him behind its door.

"There is a letter for you, Mr. Ladd."

That was bad enough, in spite of the chance that this letter might be that very one of which he feared, now, even to so much as dream. His hands trembled over innocent insurance circulars; post cards even disagreed with him; and when, one day, his landlady met him with these fatal words —

"There is a package for you, Mr. Ladd."

—his face paled, he breathed heavily, and, murmuring

of something that he had forgotten, he turned directly upon his heel, and slunk away as he had come. It was late when he returned, long past midnight, when he crept back desperately —

To find his laundry by the stairs!

Evenings when Barbara came in to dinner her first swift glance was at Jerry's face; and there never was any need for him to say that he had heard nothing. She laughed and chatted, and more freely now, as she had been wont to do at first; but it seemed to him — though it may have been the dullness in his ears — that her gaiety was more subdued, and less original and charming. Sometimes she burst out frankly with words of homely cheer.

"Don't be disheartened. I had a dream last night. I thought I saw a ship ——"

Or, "There's *something* coming to you. I can see it, and it's just around the corner!"

Though that, of course, was not so encouraging as the ship. He loved that ship! It was a beautiful ship, full-rigged, and fairly bursting, as Barbara described it, with golden grain.

"Just wait and see!" she urged.

And Jeremy would groan:

"I *am* waiting!"

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"Eat something — do! You scarcely touch anything any more."

"But I'm not hungry any more!"

"Eat, anyway. *Please* — have *my* piece of pie."

It was the least, she explained, that she could do for him, and to his helplessness it may have seemed the most that she could do, in his ignorance that she was doing more; though there were moments when, standing sleepless by his window, gazing up at that strip of glistening stars, he wondered vaguely if they had one half the influence with editors that they have over the poor young authors who put them into love-stories, to make them true. What was there beyond those stars, he asked himself, that possibly could care about a tale of Toodlums? There was no answer. But when the manuscript came back, *that* seemed the answer.

"Oh," he said, gazing at it without a tremor, now that it was really there. "I wonder what *this* is?"

And he took it up with him, and shut the door.

### v

Barbara, entering the dining-room, and, noting from the threshold that Jeremy was not there, paused an instant, and then turned back. At the stairs she

hesitated; but again it was only for a moment, and she went up quickly and knocked upon his door.

There was at first no answer. But she knocked again; and this time so much more softly that he knew. She heard his step. Then the door opened, and they were looking into each other's eyes.

"Have you been to dinner?"

He shook his head.

"I'm not hungry," he began —

"Nor I!" she told him. She spoke breathlessly. "I thought — I thought that maybe you would take me for a walk? But not, of course, if you —"

Her cheeks flushed.

"Oh," he said, "I should like to go."

"Really?" she demanded. "*Really?*"

"Really," he assured her. "It was kind of you to think of it."

"I wanted to talk with you," she explained, as they passed together out into the evening glow. "I have been thinking — things that I wanted to say to you before you had any chance to be disheartened. Before" — and she slipped her hand into his arm — "before any great disappointment intervened."

And before he could reply, she went on eagerly:

"I wanted to remind you that it isn't of any *real*

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importance, whether — whether it comes back or not!"

"Not of any real importance?" he repeated.

"No!" And he knew without looking that her face was all a-light with earnestness. "Because, after all, either event would be only an incident. In itself, nothing — *nothing* — unless you make it so."

"Unless I make it so!"

"Why, yes! Oh, don't you see that its importance is just whatever *you* invest it with? That it is vital, for joy or sorrow, only as *you* make it vital? That it rests with *you*, not with the editors!"

"And there are so many things," she added hastily, as if she were still afraid to let him speak, "that are so much more vital to one's life than the fulfillment of any single dream. Certainly than the merest incident, the merest shadow of that dream! You are a man, first; a writer afterward. And disappointment, even if it were *not* the first, if it were the very last of a lifetime of disappointments, and even though it defeated the writer in you forever, might be the making — oh, it might be the very crowning — of the man. Victory in defeat, you know: the old, old story of idealism."

He would have spoken, but she had, to-night, a positive genius for intervention.

"I mean to say that you are not bound to succeed as a writer. Only as a man."

"But the two," he managed to interpose —

"The two," she insisted, "are not inseparable, unless you make them so."

"You said —"

"I know. I said you were a writer. But you said, too, that I was 'practical,' you remember. Well, I *am* practical; and you are a writer. But we are something more I hope!"

"*You* are something more!" he told her.

He turned and looked at her. It was the same look of surprise and wonder that he had given her when he called her practical, striving to see more clearly, in the face, half turned to him, what no one ever sees at once.

"Oh, yes! You are something more," he said. "Very much more; though being practical is not a little thing to me — it is so impossible, apparently! But you are more than that."

How much more he did not, could not, say. What she really was, was beyond his sight as yet, however he might gaze at her and wonder. He only knew that

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she was fairer than he had thought. It astonished him that he had never noted, until to-night, the exquisite delicacy of her face in its repose. It never occurred to him that until to-night — indeed, until that very moment of his wondering acknowledgement — her face had never, in his presence, known repose, content: that peace, and its mysterious beauty which are never in the face until they are in the heart, and never in the heart until one knows for sure that something of one's secret self has been revealed at last, in spite of the barriers that flesh, or circumstance, have offered to the imprisoned soul.

It was a long walk — no matter where. They took no account of any journeying but that other one in which they wandered, secretly, through unseen ways, whose shadows her presence, rather than her fair philosophy, softened for him. Her silence was more kind, more eloquent, than any words that she could find to say. And when he would have told her —

"You needn't!" she interposed, softly. "I have known it all the time. And it *doesn't* matter — does it?"

No. Nothing — no disappointment, or chagrin — had ever mattered less to him! It was very strange, and very sweet, to care so little. To see it all as the

merest incident, as she had said; as the merest shadow of a dream, that was not yet over, not yet unfulfilled, or hopeless, while she was near.

This was a miracle that he had never known before. A magic that could so transfigure the very Present, that, with all its grimness, it began to have something of that beauty which he had never seen, save in the Past or Future.

And he was only beginning to see her!

For Barbara also, the Present had its sudden loveliness.

She was beginning to be seen.

# V

## THE NOW

LIKE the watched pot that never boils, no self-respecting dream ever comes true in the hour, or quite in the fashion, of our hopes for it. It lurks, or sulks, until the back is turned, and then — for beauty always will have its own sweet way — steals in upon us unawares; or throws off its disguise of homeliness, and lo! we see that it was there already. We knew the dream, but did not recognize its strange reality.

Thus now to Jeremy, when letters were neither to be feared nor hoped for any longer, came one from — of all the last persons in the world to write to him — the editor. And, of all the last things that he ever would have dreamed of dreaming of, it offered him a Job. Not the ghost of one — a real one this time, with a jingle in its pocket.

"You might have had it six weeks ago," the editor informed him, when Jeremy appeared once more at

the deserted office, this time to stay. "Where in thunder have you been keeping yourself?"

"Why, you said, you know ——"

"What did I say?"

"That my stuff was fit only for the waste-paper basket."

"Did I say that?"

"Practically."

"Humpf!"

"So I took you at your word."

"You ought never to do that!"

"In fact," Jeremy confessed, "I gave up writing altogether — for a time."

"What did you do then?"

"Why, I — I went into business — as it were."

"*As it were!*"

"As it weren't!" Jeremy acknowledged.

"But you're not a business man."

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, for one thing you took me at my word. No business man ever would have done that."

"But I thought you meant it."

"Probably I did. What difference did that make?"

"Well, it made a considerable difference to me!"

Jeremy assured him, rueful'y. "But it's all right now.

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Why, I'm just beginning to live! I've been a little slow growing up," he confessed, "but I've had my eyes opened. You have no idea what a change these last few weeks have made! I'm beginning to see things differently. Everything!"

"Humpf! *How* are you beginning to see things?" Jeremy pondered.

"It's pretty hard to put it in a word," he said. "But I'm beginning to see the romance of life. The drama of it. The poetry of it — of the every-day, common life, I mean. *This* life," he explained, looking far off, and straight through the editor's grizzled head, which he apparently did not see at all. "I'm beginning to see the life right here about us — *now*. That's it: the Now!" he exclaimed, finding the word for it at last. "I'm beginning to see the *Now!* The Romance of the Now!"

"Always before," he went on thoughtfully, "I'm afraid I've been a — a good deal of a — what you would call a — *dreamer!*" His face flushed a little at all the folly that the word recalled. "But now," he added, "I'm beginning to see things as they are."

"How do you know that you are beginning to see things as they are?" the editor demanded, though in a mild tone that invited confidence.

"Because," Jeremy replied, "they are so much more interesting, so much more thrilling, so much more beautiful than they ever seemed before!"

The editor reflected. He too, before he was aware of it, was beginning to look off, and see things. It was a strange influence that Jerry always had. It may have been his eyes — the light in them, so mysteriously rapt; or his voice, with its subtle and contagious note of awe. But, wherever Jerry was, there was reverie weaving its silvery web, so silently, so swiftly that before they knew it men found themselves enmeshed. The weaving, from one heartstring to another, stirred sometimes faint echoes of forgotten song. Old lovesongs, chiefly — love, I mean, of life. Men who had neglected, or who hated, or dreaded, to look back, found themselves seeing things again that softened every hardened fibre of their thoughts. Old roseate vistas, renounced as folly and illusion, would open up again, making them wonder where their eyes had been all those intervening years; and whether, after all, they had not been blinder in their knowledge than in their innocence. And then, sometimes, like the editor, they would break the web, half angry, or ashamed, to have been caught in such a childish lure — as if they had been discovered reading fairy tales.

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"Humpf! I put all that in the waste-basket long ago! And now you come in here — confound you — you're a nice fellow, Ladd, but — I've got to *work!* I haven't time to gawp at life! You haven't either. What the devil do you mean by always —"

Jerry would have retired precipitately to the door, but his flight was checked, sternly.

"Here, you — dreamer! Come back. Now don't you run away again and go into business! Understand? You remember what I told you?"

"W-which?" Jeremy inquired, cautiously.

"*Whicb!*" The lightning in the editorial eyes was followed instantly by thunder. "Why, that you're not to be always taking people at their word, that's all. What I said just now was true enough, heaven knows; but that's no reason why you should up and run, and commit suicide in Wall street!"

"I've r-renounced Wall Street," Jeremy assured him, "f-forever."

"Very well, then. But look here —"

It was a fierce glare, and blinding to eyes accustomed to the softer light of far perspectives.

"What are you going to do this evening?"

"N-nothing."

"All right, then. You can come home with me to

dinner. Now, you understand! I mean this, every word of it. And I don't ask every bally idiot to go home with me. No, sir! It's the only place that I've got left to ——”

The glare faded, just sufficiently to warrant the conclusion ——

“— see things as they are!”

And, oddly enough, as Jerry stood there facing the editor — looking him, as the little office-boy had said, in the eye — the glare vanished, and, before he was aware of it, the editor himself was looking off again, straight through Jerry's head, so that Jerry withdrew without his knowing it, and he was left alone with his thoughts in a foolish haze.

“Hang these dreamers!” he muttered to himself, ruffling the papers on his desk. “And hang their Now!”

## II

But it was a pleasant Now. A regular income is always an agreeable thing, and lends colour even to one's dreams. A fast colour that does not ebb and flow like those elusive dyes which one procures from rainbows.

The editor had offered Jeremy a job; but it was not a job that Jeremy accepted. It was a solemn mission.

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And it was as a knight of the ancient and eternal chivalry that Jerry sallied forth each morning upon those quests that led him up and down the highways and byways of that world whose drama and romance he had begun to see. Upstairs and downstairs, into the houses and offices and meeting places of his fellow-men, he wandered in an errantry of subtler and more romantic purposes than those on which he was despatched. For he sought not merely facts, he told himself, but rights to be championed and wrongs to be redeemed. This consecration transfigured even the humblest mission with the high hope that imprisoned in the homely and routine — such assignments as are usually entrusted to young knights of journalism — he would find fair truths to be released: truths only to be descried by an eagle eye, and only to be rescued by the valour of a lion heart, and the might of an unsheathed pen. Even a statistical report, such as he found in public offices, he warned himself, might be a donjon-keep, concealing dark deeds from the outer sun. He watched vigilantly, questioned cunningly, listened thoughtfully, lest any Lady should sigh or perish in a tower, while he rode by.

"Every assignment has its story," was the motto on his crest. "I'll find it!" was his vow.

"But you don't have to find it!" he was told. It was an old, gray-headed man-at-arms who said it. "You don't have to find it, boy. It has been found for you already. You don't expect, do you, to find anything that *we* have missed? What have *we* been living for, all these years? There is nothing new under the sun. The moulds are ready for you."

"I don't understand."

"Why, it's plain as day. Everything that happens has happened before, time and again, and been written for you. *We've* made the moulds for you, hard and fast. The moulds are the traditions. Use 'em. They're yours. You have only to reach up your hand and take 'em down. You don't understand?"

"Not quite."

"Why, look here: take the suicide story. There are moulds for that. Girl jumps into the river. Well, you haven't time — none of us has — to hunt out that old, old tale — old as the everlasting hills! You take down the matrix, and be thankful that it's all so easy. It's labelled for you: Pretty Girl Suicides for Love. You can't go wrong. What's more, it's true! What does life amount to? It's only a shuffling of names and dates."

"But suppose she isn't pretty?"

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"Every girl's pretty! Go ask the moulds."

"But suppose it *wasn't* love?"

"It's always love! The moulds will tell you so. All girls that suicide, suicide for love. It's the history of the phenomenon. Arsenic or water — it's all the same. There's a man in the case, you can bet your salary — though he may have been a ghost!"

Jerry shook his head.

"That's putting stories *into* life," he said, "not drawing stories out. It's the truth we're after; not what we guess, or imagine, or have heard as truth."

"Oh, is it, though!"

"And the truth," cried Jeremy, "isn't just what it seems to be, at the first glance. Or what we imagined it would be at all. Take the weather-story yesterday."

"Go on. I wrote it," said the man-at-arms. "Go on," he insisted calmly. "I shan't mind."

"Well," Jeremy confessed, "you jumped to unwarrantable conclusions."

"Go on. Proceed."

"It was hot for autumn; but it *wasn't* true, that mankind got out its old straw hat! All down Broadway men were mopping their faces and suffering from the heat; but not a single straw was to be seen. I noticed it particularly."

The other laughed.

"Oh, well, that was only a way, an easy way, of telling the truth: of saying that it was hot. Only a journalistic figure, as it were, of speech, to say *how* hot — so hot that Man went and got out his old straw hat again. *The Return of Summer — dear old mould!*" said the man-at-arms. "Many's the blistering autumn day I've used it, and"—he winked solemnly—"kept cool!"

"Ah, yes," the young knight protested, "but there *was* a story there — a true story — the one you missed by keeping cool. The truth that, for habit and custom, Man would roast rather than be comfortable. *That* was the weather-story yesterday."

The other yawned.

"Possibly. Possibly. If you want to weigh thistle-down. *I* don't. There isn't time. And while you are balancing your fluffy little truths and phrases, the paper goes to press! — I cool, you hot; my story *in*, your story *out*. And what fills the paper, fills the little brown Saturday envelope, my lad! Remember that!"

Jerry shook his head. He said no more, but, in the secret chambers of his heart, he polished up his shield and lance, and sallied forth more sure than ever that his creed was best; and that, in the end, Truth would

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assert itself as the thing most practical as well as beautiful, even in a world of moulds and expediency. But, right or wrong, under that banner he would fight and live, or fight and die, faithful to his vows.

### III

Alas! Even in the beginning-to-be-romantic Now, the days would pass without adventure, until, sometimes, it seemed to Jeremy that not men only, but life itself, mocked his high thoughts of it, with low realities. But then, again, he would remind himself that for knights always there must have been long days of spiritual famine, through which they roved, thirsting and hungering for opportunity. Always, for heroes as for common men, there must have been the dust and heat: the unheroic dust and heat, not of high battle, but of the long, low, drowsy, noonday road across the plain, without an inn, without a brook or bough, to cheer or shelter them; and the small pestiferous annoyances, frustrations, and miscalculations, and all the little nipping fleas of circumstance, mocking their lofty calm and the midnight vows of their idealism.

All this was helpful to a maiden knight. It was cheering to recall when the Now eluded him — lurking, or sulking, like any other lovely dream, refusing to

be realized. When, here before his very eyes, the Present, veiling its romantic heart from him, seemed often as far and unapproachable as ever the Past had been, or the Future, in his earlier visions. He knew that there *was* romance, somewhere beneath that humdrum surface — somewhere behind that jesting face of things. That, in disguise, fair truths slipped by, lonely and friendless, in the throngs; and that, all about him, life's loveliest graces were sighing out imprisoned lives, in towers, even as he watched and waited, listening for their faintest call, and armed and ready to succour and restore.

And it was always then — then when he was bravest, truest, eagerest — that the Now would laugh at him! At that futile chivalry, at that chaste, dumb wistfulness of Youth. That was the one inexplicable, disheartening, humiliating thing about the Now. Its untimely and utterly irreverent facetiousness! It would never take him seriously; and, what was worse, to make a fool of him, was always willing to sacrifice itself! — its native dignity, its secret beauty, of which he caught but fleeting gleams and shadows, while it cut strange capers and played odd pranks with him, nudging his sword-arm, or mimicking his braced and sober gallantry, and twiddling its fingers at his wrath! It was

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enough, sometimes, to make one doubt; to make one fling his lance into the dust, and join the laugh, swearing that life was but a jest.

And yet — no — while in all that low buffoonery there remained one single gleam of a divine romance, he would be true to it! Always, for knights of the eternal order of idealism, there must have been these clownish mockeries along the road — these empty grins to pass, and never see; this gutter persiflage bringing the blush into the cheek, yet never to be heard, or answered. Always, before, the scorching plain; always, in the dust behind, the alien village and its hoarse derision — even for heroes.

"Hi, there! what are you dreaming of?"

It was the voice of the Now, roaring through the editor.

"Oh! I was thinking, that was all."

"What were you thinking?"

"I was thinking," Jeremy replied, "that — I'd forgotten my handkerchief."

"Humpf! It must have been a glorious handkerchief! Why, say, you looked like Joan of Arc, or Francis of Assisi: they were always seeing handkerchiefs. Same kind of wild eyes as yours, exactly. But, to come back to earth, here *is* a handkerchief —

a regular bandanna for you. Fact! A regular buccaneer's bandanna! A riproaring sea-yarn, my hearty — A Tale of the Spanish Main! Run down and find Cap'n Jack Smith of the Schooner *Ida* — 864 Backwater Street. Just in from Barbadoes with a cargo of mutineers. And say — *busile!*"

Jerry felt a tap upon his shoulder as he turned away. It was the man-at-arms.

"Fine old mould for *that* tale!" he muttered enviously. "You can't go wrong. It's all there — blood, bones, dialect and all! Mutiny On the High Seas. Old favourite o' mine." He winked warningly. "Better use it!"

Jerry laughed gayly as he folded up his copy paper and — hustled was the word — down to Barbadoes, his mind awash with buccaneers, beards, bandannas, earrings, pistols, cutlasses, doubloons, and blood-flecked foam. Years and years he had yearned for those magic seas. Now, in a way, he was to sail them! And he was to see their coloured isles! Not through the dreaming eyes of an idyllist ashore — not even through the eyes and glasses of that prince of idyllists, who saw the light which never was on sea or land, save only upon Martinique. He was to see them now through the bloodshot vision of a master, not of words,

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but men: one of those hairy heroes of the deep, of the Spanish main, come suddenly to life again—Cap'n Jack Smith of the Schooner *Ida*.

Something of the dialect began already to be audible above the roar of waves and trolley-cars—a sturdy speech, flavoured with tobacco juice, and hot with the breath of scorn of God and man—as he put, full sail, into Backwater Street. A woman met him at the door. Two or three children peered out around her bespattered skirts, as she let them down, and wiped the sea foam from her hands.

“Well?”

Jerry bowed politely.

“May I see Cap'n Smith?”

“Sure. He's out in the back. Go straight through the hall—that's right—right through the door ahead o' you.”

It was a dirty hall, and it ended in a dirty yard, full of noise and rubbish. And the captain was there. There was never any doubt of that! Stumbling through the passage, Jerry was aware of a high wind, somewhere beyond.

“You bowlegged land-lubber!”

And a plaintive zephyr of a voice protesting.

“You say what ain't true!”

"I say what I can see with both me eyes shut, you — little ditch-digger, you!"

And then again, the mild rebuke of a little man with his back to Jerry:

"You say what ain't true!"

Across his shirt-sleeved shoulders, with their galluses, Jerry made out at once, the buccaneer, whose scowling visage and hairy breast were all that the wildest dreamer could have desired. It was a noble sailor-man, tattooed and fearful to behold, for he was heaving with his wrath.

"Well, what do *you* want?" roared the hurricane.

"I beg your pardon, but I'd like to see Cap'n Smith."

"Huh! You would, would *yuh*? Well, all I got to say is, it's lucky for *bim!*" and the hurricane jerked out one tattooed fist in the direction of the milder gale. "I was just thinkin' o' takin' a good close look at him, meself! And maybe I will yet, when you've got through with him, the — old hawser! Huh — hawser! I guess not. *He* ain't no hawser. He's nothin' but a bit o' pack thread!"

"Lanigan," said the little captain, quivering with reproachfulness, "you say what ain't so! And you *know* you say what ain't so! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

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"Ashamed, is it? Yes, I ought to be ashamed! I ought to be ashamed o' standin' here arguin' with the likes o' you — you little spindle-shanked nanny-goat!"

"You heard what he said!" the captain cried, turning to Jeremy with an appealing gesture, and a countenance, soft-bearded as a lamb, and pale with horror. "You heard what he said!" And then, facing the hurricane again, the little gale rose shrilly to the occasion. "For two cents I'd have you arrested! I would! You haven't got no more sense — you haven't got no more sense —"

It was a soprano crescendo; while the captain, standing a-tiptoe, shook his forefinger at the mutineer, and gasped for words to express the heights and depths of his emotion.

*"You baven't got no more sense than an old empty tomato can! No sir!"*

And turning to Jeremy again, his blue eyes filled with tears.

Meanwhile, Lanigan, breathing smoke and flames, had retired to his own back door, where he continued, from time to time, to deliver himself of a soliloquy for the benefit of all concerned.

"The old penny-whistle! Did ye hear him pipe at

me? ‘*No more sense than an old tomato can!*’ Him a captain! Why, he ain’t fit to sail a wash-toob!”

“*You* heard him!” Captain Smith was saying to Jeremy, as they went inside. “Why, I never was talked to like that in all my life! Never! And I’ve been in rough places too. And seen rough men. Drunken men! But none like him! Why, he ain’t fit to have around!”

“What was the trouble?” Jeremy inquired, striving to imagine how that other mutiny had been quelled, on the high seas.

“Why, I was standing right there, and I says to him, I says, ‘I think we’re a-goin’ to have rain.’ Just like that! And says he, ‘No,’ says he, ‘we *ain’t*!’ Well, I shut up. I wasn’t a-goin’ to get into no argument. For, if there’s anything I hate, it’s to have any unpleasantness around. I never did like it, and I never will. I pay my bills, and never interfere with nobody, nohow — never. And why he should up and abuse a peaceable —”

“I thought he was one of the mutineers,” Jerry interposed.

“The *what?*”

“Mutineers.”

“*Him!* Why, he’s nothin’ but a bill-poster.”

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"Well, captain, would you mind telling me — I'm from the *Bulletin* — about the mutiny?"

"The *w-what?*"

"The mutiny on the *Ida*. You're just in from Bar-badoes, I hear."

"Yes, but there wasn't no mutiny! We never have no mutiny on the *Ida* — do we, *Ida*?"

"Well, I should say *not!*" came a healthy bass voice from the wash-tub just within. It startled Jeremy. He had heard it before; but after the events which had intervened, and owing to its suddenness, and a new and surprising depth and volume — awakened, doubtless, by the very notion of a mutiny — it gave him a strange sensation, as if, in some mysterious way, it was really the captain who was rubbing clothes, while he talked to *Ida*.

"It must have been a rumour!" said the tub.

"Well, yes, I suppose it was," the captain — if he *was* the captain — agreed. "I suppose it was. But the strange part is that the *Bulletin* is *always* a-hearin' about our havin' a mutiny on the *Ida*! I don't understand it, at all. Why, you're the third young man from the *Bulletin* as has asked me that question. Yes, sir. Why only last spring there was a feller here, and *he* was from the *Bulletin*; nice young feller; too, and we told him we *never* had no mutiny on the *Ida* ever. And

sir, that feller went back an' wrote us up — both of us — somethin' terrible! You'd a-thought that we was pirates!"

There was a suspicious sound within, and Ida — unless it really *was* the captain — darkened the doorway, and wiped her hands of foam.

"I hope *you're* not that kind o' young feller!" was her greeting. And there was something in the tone of it, or rather in the *undertone* of it, that sounded so familiar Jerry wondered if she might not be the bill-poster's sister. At any rate there were wind-clouds and other evidences that a storm was brewing; and the little captain, having a weather eye for all unpleasantness, as he had said, hastened to intervene.

"Oh, my, no!" he said anxiously, and for the first time Jeremy began to have a fellow feeling for the mariner of such uncertain seas; "oh, dear, no! *He's* not that kind of a young feller. He doesn't look it."

"Neither did the other feller look it!" was the grim response, so that Jerry thought it prudent to reassure them.

"Don't worry," he entreated, pledging his knightly word. "You're safe with me. Perfectly safe! Both of you!"

"Huh!"

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Jerry could have sworn, now, that she was a sister, or at least a relative of the bill-poster. That she was the captain there could be no longer any slightest doubt!

"You see," it was explained to him, "there's no one on the *Ida*, ever, except jest *us*. Jest ourselves. Yes, sir, it's jest as nice a little quiet family affair as you could wish to see, the whole kit and caboodle of us, big *and* little, including two pretty fair-sized boys as can sail with the best of 'em, if I do say it. Yes, sir. Oh, we have a gale now and then—but nothin' human. Nothin' human ever happens. No, sir. But with *her* there—well ——"

"You can see, young feller," the captain of the *Ida* interposed, "that there *couldn't* never be no mutiny, nohow! Y'understand?"

"*Perfectly!*"

Jeremy bowed, and at the same time backed discreetly through those outer portals into the safer, sunnier, more heroic Now.

"*I understand!*"

## VI

### LARK FLIGHTS

IT WAS a relief, each evening, to look into Barbara's homelike face, to hear her voice as she recounted her mild adventures, or to watch the lights and shadows in her eyes as she listened to his own more vivid chronicles of that living maelstrom in which they had been whirled. Often, after dinner, they walked together, or went to plays, viewing them from lofty, inexpensive vantages, so that they knew in time, as Barbara declared, the tops of most of the celebrated actors and actresses of their day. Or, as Jerry put it, they had of dramatic art a barber's point of view. However that may have been, they had the eyes to see through the head to the very heart of things; and these emotional diversions, with their varied pageantry of joy and sorrow, gave them opportunities to weep and laugh together — privileges of intimacy that the ordinary humdrum course of things could not have granted them so lavishly, with such swift and subtle disclosures and conclusions.

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One midnight as they returned, sad and silent, from the theatre, with their eyes upon the slimy pavement underfoot, rather than on the long perspective of shining street lamps that were quite as true to life, Barbara sighed:

"Oh, dear! I wish we hadn't gone. Such things *are*, of course. But a play like that leaves you with a false suggestion — that its story is inevitable. For all of us. And that isn't true."

"Still, I'm not sorry that we went," Jeremy made answer, out of his own dark musings. "It makes some things — *you*, for example — so much more — so much more . . . exquisite."

There was really nothing for Barbara to say, so she said nothing — wondering if she ought to be certain that she had heard aright. But, from that instant, the play was no longer of the slightest consequence. Life, after all, was so much more memorable, so much more thrilling even, than art could be. She forgot the pavement; even the street-lamps were a little inadequate to express the hopefulness of life; and, before she was aware of it, she found herself calling his attention to the splendour of a certain particularly extraordinary star.

And it was thus, star by star, that their sky bright-

ened. It was not a sudden illumination. It was not fireworks. It was a gradual and steadfast revelation of the shadowy world, in which they found themselves oftener and oftener together, as a place of the most astounding and mysterious beauty, when one came to look at it. When one trusted one's own eyes, rather than another's. But it did not burst suddenly upon the enraptured vision. It was the vision that grew clearer, first; and then, star by star, the ancient loveliness was disclosed to them.

Love, therefore, had no single splendid scene of declaration and surrender, as the books and plays would lead one to suppose. It is the easy way to tell what never yet has been caught in words. Love was at first, for them, no more than a pleasant consciousness of one another. The right to speak — to say those things at which a glamour stole upon the world, all unforeseen — was never asked for, never granted or denied. The right to count upon each other's vision, each other's sympathy, the right to trust each other's glance, even when its glow deepened, each other's handclasp, even when it lingered — these, also, never were defined. But they found no strangeness in each other's arms, at last! — so silently the world had faded into the merest background for the eternal

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legend, and, star by star, love's twilight had become love's radiant night.

It was not The End for them: for the idyl of their love. It was only the beginning of a new chapter in the middle of the book; of new and more rapturous verse in a poetry of life that neither began nor ended for them there, in that lyric hour: one yet more tender word in a confession that, day by day, syllable by syllable, had grown eloquent, and was still unfinished. Words, these were, that are better imagined, better remembered, than described. Young love has a native speech that has never been translated. A dialogue whose fleeting and elusive shadow the most subtle art has never caught, save only for an instant — the merest gleam of vision and remembrance — here and there in that comedy of our inexperience which it is so easy to recall, and so amusing to record. Theocritus, perhaps, or Landor — but, then, Theocritus must wait a thousand years or so for an audience that will not laugh; and for the same immunity Landor must go back his thousand, and set his lovers in the leafy refuge of antiquity. From first to last, art but burlesques or over-draws, or over-colours, or at best must symbolize, what comes and vanishes so secretly as to make one wonder if one saw, or only dreamed of seeing. It is

easy to doubt what one watches for in vain; and what never comes again, one soon forgets.

## II

Where all this happened, it is hard to say. The great world smoked and simmered, and, dragon-fashion, lay in wait for them. They were nowhere to be seen!

Doubtless if one had known where to look — but that also is so soon forgotten. Where is it that lovers pledge their vows? From whence do they return with so strange a light upon their faces? One sees them going, and anon one sees them coming back — but meanwhile?

The Park? Oh, no. Nor in the country; nor on the river; nor in the shadows of deserted streets. One meets them in all these places, but they are always on their *way* — always going, or returning; never *there*. Jeremy and Barbara one used to meet sometimes under the pleasantest of circumstances; but their faces told you of still pleasanter, from which they had but just descended, *condescended*, to your lower plane; and to which, right willingly, they would return — if you would be so kind! How or whither did they go back, when one *was* so kind? Where *is* There?

Well, putting two and two together — for Jeremy

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and Barbara were one pair, and there was another—it is not so difficult to say. Jeremy, first and last, confided a good deal while he was here; and still his manuscripts, those tell-tale travellers that were always coming home, like prodigals, to be refreshed, are witnesses to forgotten mysteries. They tell of a place where dreamers, strangers, or call them what you will, armed with high thoughts of life, but encountering on every hand earth's low realities, may turn for refuge, and find sanctuary for their wounded souls. "The Sky of Love" is the title of one of them. "Lark Flights" is another. Certainly it is only from some sky, and only in a rapturous soaring, that the earth can ever seem so low and far and insignificant as it appears to lovers' eyes. And in love, life's order is inverted: heaven first, earth afterward.

Earth afterward! That is the sadness in the song. It is the refrain of love. Over and over, it appears, Jeremy and Barbara came back to it, and always with a sigh. Ways and Means—that was the hard, low ground to which they always fluttered down from happier things. Yet even on the earth again, something of that upper light descended with them. Something of that higher freedom nerved their hopes. Earth always is a little heavenly while love endures, as they

always found when they dropped to it again, out of their clouds and starlight; and this was that romantic, that heroic Now, some gleams of which Jerry had discerned, before he wakened to their heavenly origin.

Earth afterward — but together they would manage it. With Barbara, Jeremy predicted, his backward and obstructed life would flower in a very springtime of efficiency! It had but waited for this month of love. To be precise, and practical, twenty dollars say a week, — not an improbable income for a man inspired — would be sufficient for two idealists.

Barbara agreed.

What had been earned before, would be earned again!

That also was unanswerable.

And if a man with a sweetheart could earn twenty dollars, a man with a wife! —

It is an old argument, and, like the everlasting hills, has never been refuted — in love.

And if the wife were *Barbara*!

Well, as to that, modesty on the one hand, and awe upon the other, prevented any calculations. And the logic of the thing was so irresistible, and so practical withal. And proved so conclusively that the divine was the expedient as well!

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Thus, with Cupid in the chair, the Ways and Means Committee made short, sweet work of its budgets and appropriations, and was adjourned. But when they attempted to go back — so the story goes — when they attempted to return, that evening, whence they had come — a clock struck eleven. Straightway, around the corner, out of the forgotten world, came the Proprieties — ghostly policeman, utterly heartless, and armed with clubs.

“Move on!”

And when they lingered, only a moment or two at most, the clock struck twelve!

“Move, I say!”

“Jerry dear, I think we *ought*.”

And yet again —

“Jerry, darling, we really *must*! . . . What are those lovely lights across the river?”

“Hoboken.”

They had fallen indeed! Earth afterward — *Hoboken!* There is no such word above!

### III

Below, they opened bank accounts. It is easier said than done; but they did it, to be really practical. And Jeremy kept sending off that Toodlums novel

which was always coming back; and scribbling others — “Lark Flights,” doubtless, and “The Sky of Love” — which bear no sign that they were ever published.

Their return was Barbara’s cue. Enter Love.

“Dearheart, you must take it in the spirit of adventure.”

“I do take it in the spirit of adventure, but”— here Jeremy would toss the manuscript into an imaginary fire, from which Love would rescue it — “the same old dragon grows monotonous.”

“I know — but if you could see what *I* see!”

He would smile at that. It was so charming, that second-sight of hers! which never failed her, never grew dim, even when the mists closed in about them, shutting out every other view.

“Ah, yes; I know what *you* see.”

“What do I see?”

“You see a ship!”

“Yes,” Barbara, as calmly as the last time, would reply. “I do. I see a ship.”

“And is it,” he would ask, “the — the same old ship?”

But Barbara, in seeing things, was often deaf.

“I *do* see it!” she would insist, indignantly. “It’s in the offing, I think you call it, don’t you?”

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"I call it a mirage," he said. "They don't arrive, somehow, those ships of ours!"

"*One* did!"

There was never any answering that. One dream, indeed, had floated in to them, a fair reality with great white wings of hope; and she had only to remind him of it and its merchandise, only to reproach him gently with the shame of his forgetfulness, to make him see how immaterial all riches were, besides. Let no one laugh; it would be a sad confession. Young love alone knows such fine scorn of things deemed indispensable — heaven first. Old love — earth afterward — grows prudent; prefers snug havens. But snug havens mean deserted wharves; and to laugh at young love is to laugh at the spirit of adventure, and the romance and rapture of the sea.

On land, that same old dragon of Jeremy's complaint now found two adversaries where before it had encountered one. In spite of its proximity, they went on planning. They planned a home under its very nose; for they would place it safely in the magic circle of their dreams — which *must* come true, they were so beautiful. It is a fair philosophy, and it has the merit of being true; for so long as one believes it, it never fails. Those who lose faith in it, lose sight also.

Lose sight of that other, that Epic life, which is now and here, to-day as surely as ever it was yesterday and will be to-morrow, with its ships in the offing, and its haunted wood, where Jeremy had wandered up and down alone. For it was there — it was not in New York at all — that Jeremy had fought those solitary battles with that ancient dragon of despair. There, in that same old shadowy forest where Arthur's men performed their prodigies centuries before, he had battled from dawn till nightfall, and been wounded unto death; and now, at last, as in those elder legends, he had awakened to the consciousness of soft hands binding up his bruised and aching body, and of pitying eyes restoring his dejected soul to life again.

Ask love if poetry is dead! Young love, not old. It is the old which is mad. Its shield and lance are on the dusty wall, but it denies as myth what it has lived as history, and warms its hands over the embers of a fire whose kindling it has utterly forgot. Ask youth what youth is. It, only, knows; but alas! — is dumb.

Jeremy and Barbara, living romance, could never find the words for it. Feeling about them that haunted forest, braving its perils, and resting in its shadowy glades, they could only gaze wistfully into each other's eyes, and wonder. How it had come to pass that they

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were there! How he had happened to be riding by that day! *Which* day! Alas! already they were beginning to forget — what they had never known till it was over!

It is the way with dreams. Knight that he was, and long as he had watched and waited for Opportunity, he did not know, nor could she tell, the place or hour in which that dream of chivalry had come true.

But he had her word for it, that, somehow, somewhere in the enchanted forest, he had rescued a lady from a lonely tower!

And she had his word, that, for her, if need be, he would slay all the dragons in the world!

### IV

All that was true. But it was only the wonder, it was not the rapture of the dream. The Sea of Ships and the Forest of Dragons were still of earth, though an earth transfigured, it is true. But love, it seems, had a higher, more ethereal mystery, of the sky, which Jeremy, in those lamented manuscripts, was always seeking words for. After all, it is the sky that is love's native element. They were lovers — or so their silences rather than their words confessed — not only in what was near and obvious, but in what was far and mystical,

and could never be explained. And only love, and only love when it is young, knows ecstasies that spurn the earth; that will not be content to climb, painfully, to the mountain tops, whose exaltations are among the snows, but must mount straight upward from the meadows, higher, and ever, ever, ever higher, in those lark flights of the unfettered spirit, that knows not how, nor whither, nor even why, it soars and sings.

One moment she would be sitting there, upon the greensward of the forest, her hands about her knees, silent, in a reverie of sunbeams. The next she would appear to him to fade into a dream of tender light, in which, transfigured first and then transformed, she seemed to float and hover like a bird. Yet was not a bird; even in love's young dream she was not as mortals know the birds. It was the flight and soaring that seemed birdlike, in these transcendent moments of their comradeship. It was that sudden vision which lovers know — only lovers, and only when love is young — of the world, so far, so small, so insignificant, down there below them! For where she floated, so did he — free, and high, and scornful, and forgetful of everything in life except themselves — leaving behind them, farther and farther, that low green earth of toil and care, which is only to be spurned on wings. *This*

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was their sky. And it was theirs, all of it: all of this pale, blue boundlessness of love, through which he followed, turned and followed, sinking to her eagerly, rising to her wistfully, who was ever just, just, *just* beyond him! — too swift and subtle for his clumsy flight. And then — all in an instant it was over. She was there again, seated as before upon the greensward, her hands about her knees.

That was the pain of it — that low return. For to rapture, wonder even is an earth-bound thing. And to walk, when one has known, on wings, the feeling of the sky! Homeward the flowers even, and the wind-voiced trees, were now too near, too crude, for loveliness. The touch of earth was clogging to the feet. The sound of words, such words as they could think to utter, wrought foolish discords in the heavy air, and only silence had any melody.

Love, young love, is the name for it — that rapturous flight above the common earth, which young hearts spurn together, wing to wing, yet must come back to it again — and find it sad.

### v

It was not to be expected that they should tell others what they never could tell themselves, what defied

analysis, and was so utterly bewildering that even the memory of it was like a rosy mist.

"Do you think I shall care for love?" asked one of Barbara's friends who as yet was ignorant, gravely ignorant, of those famous mysteries.

"Oh, my dear! — *Yes!*"

"But what makes you so very sure?"

"Why — you can't help it!"

"But suppose I prefer to help it?"

Barbara was dumb.

"I don't know," she said at last. "I never thought of that."

"And suppose I *do* help it?" the other one insisted.

"Oh, you can't do that!"

"Why not?"

"You won't have a chance!"

"Why not?"

"You won't have time!"

"Why not?"

"Because you won't know anything about it, until—until it is too late!"

"*Why* won't I?"

"I don't know!"

"*Why* don't you know?"

"I don't know *why* I don't know!"

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"Well, what *do* you know?"

Barbara laughed.

"Why, I — I don't know what I know!" she cried, helplessly.

"And is *that* love?"

"Yes! That's love!" said the one who knew. And the one that didn't know shook her head doubtfully and smiled.

"Well, Barbara dear," she said, "I never met a person who knew so little, and looked so much. But I'll trust your face for it."

That was precisely what they did themselves. It was all a venture — a venture of faith, like all adventurings, whether of the earth or air. Doubt takes no chances; risks no heart-throb; never knows, nor dares to know, the thrill of any splendid hazard or embarkation. They had found Romance. That much, at least, must be conceded to love's younger, braver dreams. But they had found it in nothing that was safe or sure.

That was what made the heart leap! That was what made them gasp, and laugh, in the face of dragons, on the edge of the abyss. It was not the wonder, it was not the rapture of the dream — it was the risk and recklessness. Faith's old adventure into mystery —

Romance, whose starlight was in their faces, so that they shone strangely to the world of doubt and fear.

"I feel," she told him —

"How do you feel?"

"Why" — she caught her breath — "I feel as if anything, *anything*, might happen now!"

"And now," he answered, "we are ready for it!"

They were ready, indeed; but when it came it found them dumb. It seemed a miracle; perhaps it was. Perhaps in faith they had discovered an eternal law, with power even in that substantial world around them.

"Things — don't — just — happen!" Barbara said, when they could speak.

But Jeremy could only stare. He only knew that it was not a dream which trembled in his hands.

It was *Forty Dollars!*

And in the offing there was a fleet of sails!

"I wrote it in two hours!" he said, breathlessly. "How much would that be a month? *You* figure it; I can't seem to count."

"But, Jerry dear, you couldn't do it *every* two hours!"

"I could do it once a week!"

"Oh — are you sure?"

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"Yes! — *now*. Now, I'm sure. Now I'm sure of anything — everything! . . . *You!*"

"Oh, Jerry, I — I think we ought to wait!"

"*Wait!* We will wait always if we wait now — now when everything, *everything*, is coming true! Why do you suppose that it was sent!"

"Was it sent?"

"Things don't just happen," he reminded her. "Not things like this! Things that we've been dreaming of!"

They were both in tears. She had shut her eyes — his own were so convincing; and it was so dizzy high, that precipice on whose very brink he was asking her to trust to wings. They were beautiful wings — beautiful . . . but dreams — every pinion of them!

Her heart misgave her. But it was the same heart that, a fortnight later, in the little Chapel of the Divine Compassion, beat tremulously, stopped, and beat again; and then — without a tremor of anything but faith and joy — felt itself lifted into space and borne away upon the starlit air.

## VII

### CLOUD SHADOWS

HERE is no lovelier quarter of New York than that in which they came to dwell; for while it is pleasant to float upon the ecstasies that are the heart and soul of all fair beginnings, love builds its nest upon the solid earth. Not on the ground, however. They built theirs high, under the eaves, in a mansion that even common eyesight could discern, though in a neighbourhood — one might as well confess it, first as last — whose very existence has been denied.

It is a quarter so old-fashioned and exclusive that not a real-estate firm in all the city ever has been able to get its hands upon it. Not a foot of it is for sale. It is never in the advertisements. There are folk on Fifth Avenue, and on Riverside Drive, who would give half their fortunes to be able to live there. Poor souls, they do not even know its name!

Jerry used to slip off into it after the day's work was done, and, with Barbara on his arm, they would

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wander blissfully through its pleasant thoroughfares, where even the noises of city life are softened to the ear. The drivers of trucks go softly there; and, oddly enough, not by virtue of any ordinance of the board of aldermen, but through the sheer love of not disturbing folk, who might have other things to think of. Even the wagons full of milk cans are quite melodious in that part of town, as they skim the cobbles, providing no more than a soft accompaniment to conversation about the joy of life and the beauty of the world.

And the residents are charming! The apple-women, to cite the humblest of examples, are the dearest old motherly souls that ever lived. They would *give* you their fruit, if you would let them! And when the policemen are there at all, it is only to add a touch of colour now and then, a speck of blue, here and there, to convivial corners where the gilt signs glitter in the sun. Or they are there to pick up any of the lovely, happy little romping children that may stumble on the crossings — sweet little things, to whom Barbara was always calling Jeremy's attention, and pausing to watch, as they danced and sang about the organ-grinders.

There was one place especially that Jeremy and Barbara were continually seeking. It was about as

large as a very large pocket-handkerchief, greenish, with a pearl-gray border, and shaded by two or three gentle trees. They had started to be maples; and then, under the extraordinary influence of their surroundings, had changed their minds, and, forgetting all about their botany, had become just trees; which was exceedingly good-humoured of them, for one could imagine them anything, anything sheltering and whispering, that one particularly liked. To Barbara they were whatever they might be to Jeremy. To Jeremy they were hawthorn trees. Hawthorn trees reminded him of—"took him back so" to — Toodlumshire, where the hedgerows were enough to make one sigh, merely to remember them! Ah, well, some day they would go there. Meanwhile, the hawthorns here were fragrant in their way. What the boughs lacked themselves, a bakery opposite made up to them in the most appetizing kind of scented springtime. Indeed, it is the way in that quarter of the city. Everything helps everything else to be whatever one has eyes, or ears, or nose for. And to Jeremy and Barbara their little corner of the world was that same fair place which is always to be found, in town or country, if only one does not go alone to look for it, and is fortunate in his company.

"Which do *you* say it will be?" Jeremy would ask,

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as they would rise from the bench under the hawthorns and stroll off home to dinner.

"I say it will be tapioca pudding. Which do you say?"

"I say prunes."

And then, if it were apple-sauce, that would be one more subject of discourse, as they finished their repast and floated out again into the twilight, when the neighbourhood is always loveliest, and lends its softly illuminated forms and colourings to any imaginable kind of dream.

Or, if they preferred, they could sit upstairs by the open window, through which the wind and moonlight came from the distant sea and sky, as sweetly as ever it blew, or shone, in country love-stories; while, from the street below, floated up music of the Italian operas, or ballads of the seasons before last, grown a little tenderer with time and distance, now that the words could be forgotten, and the lilt of the melody could be fitted to the mood or reverie of the passing hour. Or they could lean out across the sill, their heads touching, while they watched below the will o'the wisps, the cabs and popcorn men, go by; or above in the strip of heaven those other lights that seemed to say to them —

"It is the same up here, my dears — nothing but Love! You have found the secret of the universe."

Well, so they had. And, now, if only they could keep it, if only they could keep their eyesight, if only they could keep that tender quarter of the town from growing noisy and unkempt and altogether low and vulgar, after the fashion of the city, which is always changing, always losing something that one loved about it once, and that, missing, one never has the heart to seek, or the fortune to find again, elsewhere.

Not that *they* questioned it — the living Present had grown so amiable! As yet there was only one shadow upon its bliss. Always it was the same shadow. Its form was the same. Its meaning was the same. It was like a letter "S," only it was not half so graceful; for, through its curves, two lines, vertical and parallel, made of it that warning and familiar symbol of man's slavery, which, being interpreted, bids him look down, not up for star-dust; for that toll which his life — yes, even his love — must pay, earth-gold for gold-of-heaven, gleam for gleam.

## II

It was unfortunate that the other people in the boarding-house should have elected to live in a neigh-

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bourhood with which they had so little sympathy, and for which they were so utterly unsuited by spiritual and esthetic gifts. None of them realized its charm. None saw its picturesque forms, or mellow colourings. They found it, one regrets to say, intolerably deafening, and dirty, and dilapidated; and the lovely old house itself a gloomy hole full of rats and things, and frowzy, and musty, and altogether uninhabitable for persons of refinement like themselves. Yet they stayed on.

The Major stayed — that is to say, the portly little man who looked as if he might have been a major, if he had ever wanted to be one; but, who, like most of the others of the company, was now employed somewhere, doing something, somehow, for somebody. And the two or three assorted couples, for all the world like so many pairs of old shoes, limp and lumpy, run down at the heels, and with their tops askew — they stayed. And Miss Leeds, she stayed, taking her tablets, and, as was only becoming to one in her condition of life, sitting up stiffly and speaking with reserve to persons who had so recently been married. But, on the other hand, there were others who remained, with an eye for the comedy, if not for the poetry of the place. The two dear, jaunty, bright-faced Western girls of the dramatic school, for example, who were so

tremendously in earnest, and in love with life, with everything and everybody, but with Jeremy and Barbara in particular; and who made them forget the rest, whom they only bumped against, now and again, in the dim hallways, or saw — or rather felt than saw — as a more or less vague and variegated hodge-podge of humanity, at the farther tables in the basement dining-room.

It may have been that envy had somewhat to do with the general aloofness and tone of bitterness and discontent. Jeremy and Barbara, it must be remembered, had the best room in the house; though, oddly enough, at the very top of it, the top floor front. It was not the most expensive lodging, it is true; but it had the best air, and the only view of life worth mentioning, the sunniest and starriest outlook upon the world; and what was more, the fairest in-look, a springlike atmosphere pervading it, so that a bloom lay over Barbara's trinkets and Jerry's books. They often remarked upon the picture that it made, of homely cheerfulness and sweet seclusion. It gave them, moreover, a sense of living in a tower, or a dove-cote, so to speak, right at the top of things; and so serenely and sky-fully above them that they did not mind the flights of stairs, which Jerry mounted, three steps at

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once, but Barbara — as time went by — more and more slowly.

III

Love, it seemed, however, it might vaunt its present, and forget its past, must reckon always with the future. Suddenly, above the far horizon, a cloud had risen. Dimming the brightness, but deepening the awe and strangeness of that forward view, it came — inevitable, nearer with each passing day, and with other clouds attendant in its train; and gathering in its swift approach, all the doubtfulness, all the dread and menace of the unknown, into its hovering and solemn beauty.

Watching and waiting, love's voice was hushed. They had come to those silent days in which love pauses to consider; in which it sees what, according to its eyes, and light, is for better or for worse. In valleys of the shadow romance pales swiftly to a ghostly memory of the starlit air; or else, in that insight concerning which mankind has never been agreed, whether it be of vision or of blindness, the spirit of adventure is seen to be an angel not of rapture merely, nor of flight, but of tears also, and vigils, and folded wings.

Which it was to be for them — a memory, or an eternal presence — no one could foretell. Not even Jeremy of the knightly vows! — with his manuscripts coming back, just as of old, and as if there were no dream at stake, nor need at hand. Nor even Barbara of the childlike faith in knights and angels, with that mortal heaviness dulling the sense of spiritual realities. But they could trust dumbly; and there was reassurance in the light of secret-sharing smiles and glances, or in the pressure of a hand, as they sat together, silently, under the hawthorn trees, watching that little coloured world of theirs, still lovely, even with the shadows of those clouds upon it.

Indeed, sometimes, it had a strange new charm that they had never known; and which took them unawares, clutching at their throats, and stifling their laughter at its passing comedy. As if, somehow, that rippling surface had been stilled, and they had seen, beneath, the hidden springs — that under-drama, of motive and of aspiration; the poetry of life which finds no utterance but prose; those dreams that do not die, as we imagine, but live, on and on, unguessed, in a helpless poverty, whose rags and hunger are not of the body, but the soul.

"What I used to laugh at," Barbara confessed, "makes me want to cry. All the foolish things, and

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the faded things, and the broken and the crooked things, and the things with humps! But most of all," she said, more thoughtfully, "most of all, the things that try *so* hard to smile, and only — crack themselves!"

"I suppose," she added, "it's because we never guess other people's secrets, till we have secrets of our own."

She was very tender with Miss Leeds, and the Major and those old pairs of boarding-house shoes that, once upon a time, she reminded Jeremy, were bright and new.

"Think," she said to him, "of all the romance that has been forgotten — lost, somehow. . . . Oh, my dear!"

It so appalled her that she turned quite pale.

"But why are *you* afraid?" he asked.

"I don't know," was her reply, "unless . . . unless it's because *we* might turn out to be so —"

"So what?"

And she answered, sorrowfully:

"So very *human*, after all!"

### IV

It was possible, of course; but hardly likely, Jerry thought, so long as she could keep those secret-guessing

eyes of hers, and a heart so tender and compassionate. There was one word that the lovers in the old books used to use, that he had come to think half-true of her, at least. And never, he told her, could she be quite human, so long as she was half an angel.

As for his own eyesight, his own vision of that environment in which their love had built its nest, high up, under the eaves, it was yet too soon to say that any of its romance had faded. Shadows there were, of gathering clouds. But, after all, they only meant a little more determined and undaunted striving for life's prizes; a little graver contemplation of life's mysteries; and *faith* — that was the essential thing. Not once and for all, had they risked and ventured. Always, now, over and over, again and yet again, they must do the same. They must stop their ears, and shut their eyes, and, hand in hand, *every* day, entrust themselves to the unseen mercies of the air. To the unknown: seemingly so empty, but in reality, while faith endured, so safe and radiant with angels' wings.

And yet —

That Toodlums story was always coming back — and was laid away. And those other new ones, for whose sure success that one only little published tale had been the pledge — Barbara's wedding ring, they

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called it; those new visions, which he wrote evenings, seated at the only table in the room, and looking up at her between the lines, and when he laid each finished page among her sewing — these, too, showed that same inevitable and mocking tendency to return.

Truth to tell, they dealt with that quarter of the city which the editors, like the real-estate men, had forgotten, if they ever knew it. No such kindly apple-women ever had existed, they told each other; nor such fragrant hawthorns in the middle of the smoky town; nor any such melodious milk carts, skimming the cobbles. And when at last, driven to desperation, Jeremy sent them the story of two young married folk, nesting high up, under the eaves; and of what they saw out of their lofty, geranium-scented window; and of what they thought, and of how it all happened on fifteen dollars, more or less, a week — one wise young editor, breaking the mysterious silence in which these things are settled for better or for worse, wrote to Jeremy, suggesting in a kindly, paternal way, that if he would go, *himself*, and *get* married, and *try* living up under the eaves, with a wife and a geranium, and fifteen dollars, more or less, a week, he would doubtless understand why his rosy little idyl had been unavailable!

It was the only time that Barbara ever heard Jerry swear — a mild oath, with which the recording angel promptly debited the account of the wise young editor.

"*Jerry, dear!*" was Barbara's comment.

"Well," he answered, and his face was wonderful to behold, "I know what they want, and I'm going to give it to them!"

Prudently, Barbara removed the pins from her mouth before she asked him,

"What?"

"I'm going to write a story," Jeremy declared, calmly, and it was a splendid calm! as if, at last, the long-sought secret was in the hollow of his fist, with which he emphasized his smashing plot. "I'm going to write a story in which a man, living up under the eaves of an old boarding-house, comes home one night, and discovers that his wife has been unfaithful —"

"Why, Jerry!"

"*Yes!* He comes home, and he rears and he tears, and he throws the geranium out of the window, and goes away, before she has a chance to explain that the man he had seen her with was her poor, dear, long-lost, only brother, who had just been released from the penitentiary, where he had been confined ten monstrous

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mortal years for a crime of which he was as innocent as a babe unborn!"

"Jerry!"

"Listen! Time goes by. Years. And one day, when he's old, and rich, and sour as a crab, he chances to be passing across the street — it was the very street where he had lived so happily in those dear, dead days, before his geranium and his heart were broken — and as he toddles out into the very middle of the traffic, *clang! clang!* round the corner comes Fire Engine 23. There is a hoarse cry! Man leaps from the curb, and, at a single bound, jerks the old party from the horse's hoofs, *just* in time to be struck himself! And as he falls, and lies there, dying, in the muck and gore, whom should his upturned face disclose but ——"

"Jerry! *Who?*"

He looked at her suspiciously — almost reproachfully, she thought — as he continued:

"Why, the brother, of course. Who else *could* it have been? The one conceivable human being who could possibly have been *there*, of all the spots on earth — *then*, of all the moments in eternity — to perform the deed, and save the old boy's life; and who, all these weary years, had been, you see, the sole support of his injured and deserted sister. The old

boy finds *that* out, of course, at the — undertaker's shop."

Barbara shuddered.

"Horrors!" she said. "I loathe such stories."

And Jerry smiled. He seemed more cheerful.

"It's rather touching at the end," he assured her.  
"The long, level rays of the afternoon sun falling  
through the morgue windows, upon the ——"

"Jerry, *stop!*"

"Oh, not on *it!*"

"On what, then?"

"On *her!* On the old gray head of his dear old ducky,  
who had come in, don't you see, to identify *two* men  
instead of one. One more than she expected! And to  
weep on both — *both* heroes: the living and the dead!"

He paused. There was infinite satisfaction in his  
voice as he added:

"I could sell that story!"

"But, Jerry dear, do you think you could *write* it?"

"Write it!" he exclaimed. But then, again, more  
thoughtfully, more softly, as he considered it:

"Write it . . . . "

And, finally, in a tone half-resignation, half-con-  
tempt —

"No!"

Two days afterward he was at work again, as hopefully as ever, on one of those visions that were real to him, but, alas, as the outcome proved, as unreal to other folk as all his other unmarketable dreams.

"Suppose," he said to her one day, as they sat under the hawthorns, "that one little published story of mine should be the only one?"

The possibility had just descended on him like a cloud. And it was noticeable how, as its shadow overspread the world about them, the bloom faded — the rose and gray of walls, the tender mist of dust and distance, and the thrill of humour and of pathos in that passing comedy. All vanished in a doubt!

He felt the pressure of her hand.

"It won't be!"

"But suppose it *should* be!"

And then, under the stress of that intolerable tumult in the street, the roar and rumble of trucks and cars, which made it so difficult to speak, or hear, or even think, there, on the crowded benches, he added peevishly:

"What is the use of all this interminable hoping, striving, *failing* —"

His voice broke. But, instantly, he crushed her

hand in his, and smiled — only he had the feeling, somehow, that it was the merest crack in that grotesque bravado of his face!

"Suppose," she told him, "it were the last that you should ever write — you would still be You!"

"But what *am* I? That's what I've been trying to find out!"

"Something," she answered, "that you never dream of!"

She smiled fondly. Even in another's faith, something of that former bloom, it seemed to him, came back — something of that ancient hope around which all our planetary lives revolve eternally. Faith holds us fast to it, even in the night; but, were it not for love, no morning ever would o'erspread the sky.

Often they sat together, waiting, under those trees that were sometimes hawthorns, sometimes not; in what was now an intolerable din, and yet again the merest murmur; while they watched, in faith, a world all coloured like a dream — in doubt, a world all blighted, with the shadows of those gathering clouds.

But it was then, when the past was so irrevocable, the present so precarious, the future so inevitably pledged to pain, no less than pleasure, that he felt that first, deep thrill of a romance that was neither of the

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past, nor present, nor future, merely — but of them all! An eternal, a divine romance, in which, not merely as Jeremy and Barbara, but as Man and Woman — strangely journeying, they knew not why, nor whence, nor whither — they had found each other's hand!

He remembered always the hour, the very instant, when the vision dawned upon him. They were walking homeward, and she had begged him not to go so fast. And as they went more slowly, and he felt how heavily, how helplessly, she leaned upon him — it was then.

And when he turned and looked — lo! . . . that self-same vision was in the joy and sorrow of her eyes!

## VIII

### IN THE GARDENS OF THE KING

**I**N THE fulness of time Barbara went away to Toodlums, and Jeremy was left alone. It was that first, that age-long separation, only to be soothed by daily letters, and haunted perpetually by ghosts of every foolish or untender word that had been uttered, and by the shadows even of those hasty thoughts withheld from speech. A sad but chastening chapter in the idyl of young love, with its daily confessions and absolutions, and its renewals of old vows and dreams.

Ghosts, too, of unknown but imaginable ills kept rising up over the horizon of his mind, and, drawing nearer with the appointed day, plucked at his heart-strings and played grim melodies upon them in the sleepless silences of the night. This trembling emphasis upon his love made the rest of life a confusion of mere trivial realities. Even his rejected hopes, and all those other futile efforts to rescue from the ebb and flow of things about him some little treasure of opportunity,

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or reward — these, now, were the merest background of his life. Its heart and soul were in a world whose drama, to all but him, was silent and invisible.

How to reconcile this secret and lasting life within with its transient and rude environment of things felt and touched, this inner music with that outer tumult — the old, old problem of humanity — this was the real day's work to him. Walking among those visions in which he lived and moved and had his being, however he may have seemed to dwell among material things, it was the latter that were dreamlike to him: the city-street that was really strange, and its men and walls that were the phantoms of his mind: mere shadows flecking that starlit way by which he passed, communing with those dearer forms, those more familiar presences, that thronged his hidden day, and made it happy, or made it sad, regardless of the outer world and weather.

Sometimes, mornings, in the moments of his setting forth, that outer life so charmingly reflected this other one within, that, in their harmony, the mingling of outer sunlight and inner hope, and of the movement and sound about him with the unseen stir and the unheard voices of his thoughts, he knew a momentary thrill and bliss, which seemed the promise of some

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sweeter and more lasting unity. But as he plunged deeper into the city's storm and stress, discord and disproportion would intervene, with all their intrusions and irrelevancies. Instinctively he would shrink back into that fairer refuge. In its safe seclusion all else would fade into a blur and murmur: that vague, objective world through which he passed, strangely, in an enchanted circle of the soul.

What he was, there; what, there, he saw, and heard, and tasted — what he was, and what he felt, and did, in that divine romance of spiritual adventure, seen only by the unseen — only the eyes of love can guess. No man knows another's solitude, save in a legendary lore of dim surmises and momentary gleams. Yet it was there, where he dwelt apart, that one must seek the Jeremy whom Barbara knew, and the vantages from which he saw what other men denied so strenuously. That bloom upon the world was not inexplicable. Like the soft enchantment which lies for all of us upon the far-off hills, it was born of the ethereal distance. Looking thus, outward, from afar within, he saw, indeed, what others doubted; and, over all, a glory and a glamour that near at hand were but the common light of day.

In space and time, to gain long vistas we must

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climb, or wait; or we must seek within, those far retreats from which the outer world is but the fair horizon of the scene and setting of our nobler story — that starlit circle from which, as strangers, we gaze upon one lighted by the sun.

### II

One must forget the eaves, under which he was supposed to dwell. Even the city must be left behind, until its roar becomes the merest monotone, and its towers fade into the magic distance. Here, in these quiet places, was where he lived. And here — though he had been long a-guessing it — he was the son and subject of a King.

To know him in his palace, as Barbara knew him; to be with him among its treasures; to walk with him in those gardens of his thoughts, or to lean with him upon their terrace walls, gazing out upon that alien city, where no man recognized his royal lineage, and where, by immemorial law, he toiled daily for his bread — this was to better understand why he could smile and wait. His hour would come.

But, meanwhile, perils encompassed him on every hand. Armed fears and doubts lay waiting for him, to dog his steps. Strange voices mocked him, warning

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him to wake. His hopes were an illusion; his kingdom but a dream. That outer world alone was real, they told him; and there, among those things that he could touch and handle, he must plot and strive and trample in the dust, if he would save himself. He was not a prince, but the pauper that he seemed.

Not hireling fears alone, but lordlier foes by whom they were employed, contended with him for his birth-right, striving to cheat him of it, hope by hope, and grace by grace. Anger, and its cooler brother, Malice; dark Envy, and smooth-tongued Deceit; and Sloth, and Lust, and Pride — man's ancient enemies — met him in the market-place, haunted his palace, and supped and slept with him. These, not men, were the real companions of his daily way. And his adventures with them, battles with them, defeats and victories that left him wounded sometimes unto tears, while still he smiled at life: these were the divine romance, to which at last he had awakened. This was that fair new vision — of the dignity of life, of its high cause, and its shining destiny — ennobling love, and labour; transfiguring the city of his toil, and the room under the eaves. And this was his brave new vow, and challenge: that nothing, now — poverty, futility, nor even failure — should rob him of his royal heritage;

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that in spite of that inscrutable malevolence by which he was forever haunted and assailed, he would keep his faith in life as a splendid and heroic mystery.

Walking thus daily, in those gardens of the King, from which alone men see such visions, among its secret aisles, leafy with memories, and abloom with hopes; and lingering by those still waters that mirror every fleeting cloud and wing, every smile and frown, every gleam of goodness and shadow of sin, he was oppressed sometimes with the loneliness of it all: that thrilling beauty of remembrance and of aspiration in which he dwelt, so strangely, and, save for love, seemingly so solitary. Had he been a musician, he could have put it into song; a painter, into colour; a poet, into words. But he was none of these. And, yet, like these, he was a steward of life's mysteries; and the day would come when he must render his account. How, then, could he express this beauty in other-loveliness, for men to share? How exercise his stewardship? It is the old question that men ask, until they find themselves; until they find, at least, symbols — signs, outward and visible, for their secret visions.

For Jeremy, as yet, there was no answer.

He did not dream that in his eyes and smile men

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caught sometimes that light which never was on sea or land, but only in the King's gardens; that in his voice they heard, faintly, the music of the winds and fountains there; and that, even as their fellow in the common, sunlit world of toil, they found in him hints of some romantic mystery.

Even as he himself, seeing that they too came forth each morning from palaces and hovels of the spirit, caught glimpses through their own disguise!

### III

One morning — it was spring in the gardens of the king, and a bloom of dew and light lay, silvery, upon every leaf and flower — he went down joyfully into the city. There it was summer; and so hot and stifling that those who knew him marvelled at his strange exuberance. Some called it Youth. Others — and each according to his own peculiar vision — found various interpretations.

“You must have had a fortune left you!”

“You have had a letter from Spain!”

“Which horse did *you* back?”

“Oh, no. He has sold his Cumberland Preferred!”

“There is a woman at the bottom of it!”

He shook his head, and smiled, like one interrogated

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in a foreign tongue. It was always so. Long as he had been with them, he was a stranger still. He could not learn their speech; nor had they anything but a smiling indulgence for his own, which had a sound to them of places hidden from the world.

And yet — such is the mysterious assent we give, despite our creeds, to the very realities that we deny — if any one of them, by chance, had found some vista in his life a little more colourful than he was wont to see, or to confess to seeing; or had heard some strain of melody, more thrilling, or more tender, than he was supposed to have the ear for — in short, if they had anything to say of which they were ashamed as men, but proud as Man — it was to Jerry that they told it. He knew more of their homes, of their wives and children, of their forward fears, and their wistful retrospects, than any other man amongst them, and than any of them guessed. Under the profane bravado in which they railed or laughed at life, he saw them as they were: toiling, most of them, for others — grumbling at Sacrifice, perhaps, but making sacrifices, day by day, faithfully, and never dreaming of deserting posts or cares, however onerous; deriding Courage, and Fortitude, and Loyalty, and Hope, yet bearing, some of them, unlovely burdens — giving, each day they

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lived and toiled, the lie to that easy, sentimental pessimism which they glibly preached.

The office, therefore, was not to Jeremy what it seemed to other eyes: a mere environment of desks and employees, each with a price upon his head. Its noise and clatter, its change, its smoke and speech, were but a fleeting dream, whose reality was something nobler and more permanent: not the low comedy that it seemed, but that drama of the divine romance, in which, each day, men battle for their immortal lives with dragons and enchantments — all the vile sorcery and demonry of evil — and faint and fall, or conquer and go on their way, as heroically as ever in the legends of the past.

"You idealize men," they were always telling him.

"No; I visualize them," he would reply. "One must — to know a man. There is so little of him to be seen."

This morning was like other mornings, but, unlike most of them, was destined for remembrance. Not in the history of men and nations, nor yet in that mere world-gossip with which the office hummed, and for which great headlines were being written, while editions followed upon each other's heels; but in those records which the angels keep. It was the day when

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Jeremy, fresh from the places where he dwelt apart, and with their light in that joyful mystery of his eyes, came face to face with those grim realities illumined by the outer sun.

"Ladd," said the editor — and on the margin of the copy that lay before him, he began to trace designs out of some erratic and unsymmetrical geometry of the emotions — "I have received orders that the staff must be reduced to a working minimum. You know, of course, that in this I am as helpless as you. I'm sorry, and it goes against the grain — and, if I could, I'd keep you for yourself, you understand. But that would be — that would be *religion*," he explained, with a melancholy smile, and a quick glance upward into Jerry's face. "This is business."

And then, as Jeremy was silent, he said more cheerfully:

"You will have two weeks, of course, in which to — find yourself."

Jerry cleared his throat; but he said nothing.

"Fortunes of war!" the editor reminded him. "And you are young. There's everything in that. I shall be going, too, one of these fine mornings," he added, grimly, putting the finishing touches to a very lopsided hexagon. "That, also, will be business!"

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He looked up quietly.

"But *I* shall be old."

"Oh," Jeremy assured him, finding his voice at once, and laying a consoling hand upon the other's shoulder, "don't *you* fear! They know your worth. In your case there isn't any question of vocation. And besides," he added earnestly, seeking some still more convincing word of cheer, "even though worst comes to worst, such things — such things are all in a life-time, you know. Don't worry!"

Involuntarily, they both began to smile.

"I say, Ladd," the editor began —

"I know!" Jeremy interposed, his face flushing.  
"It is *I* who am being fired!"

And now it was the editor who cleared his throat.

### IV

**How do men find themselves?**

That was the question which Jerry asked himself, as he went out into the crowded streets, where a shadow had fallen upon the mysterious brightness of the day; and, over and over, he asked it, as the day went by — one of those brief fourteen allotted him. Never had he felt so much a stranger. And there is no loneliness like the oblivion of the crowd; no silence like the

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ceaseless roar of city life, when it has no voice for him who listens.

As he passed through that familiar square where he had walked so proudly upon one memorable occasion of his life, noting now the dejected figures on the benches, it came to him that some men never find themselves

Unfit for life — that was the phrase which kept running in his head. The suspicion that it might be applicable to himself had never dawned on him before. That there were men, of whom he might be one, who were always strangers among their fellows, always alien of thought and speech, in a world which they could only stare at, wonderingly, helplessly, like little children. Dependent ones, with doubtful gifts. Journeymen of irrelevant, almost impertinent craftsmanship, in a land that acknowledged but few and stern necessities, and where man ate bread in the sweat of a traditional toil. Wanderers afield; gleaners of wild-honey; vendors of exotic wares as fair, perhaps, but as unmarketable as love.

The possibility that, for all his dreaming, for all his striving even, this might be true of him, haunted his thoughts; and as often as he thrust it desperately back into the world from whose indifference it came to him

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— as often as he faced it with the utterly unreasonable and defenseless hope, which dwelt in that other, kinder, fairer world within — it would return, to dog his loneliness. To have known that it was true would have been easier. The inevitable is always to be borne; it is doubt and suspense that are intolerable.

He hurried from the square, from its dozing drunkards, and creatures with the bloodshot eyes who stared straight forward into space, seeing what he shuddered even to surmise. With a tightening of the heart-strings, and a clutching at his throat, he passed on into the more active turmoil of the streets, with a sense of relief in that ceaseless movement, and in his own small part in it. It was something to walk — to achieve even that barren progress; to put not only the stones under his feet, but those hard thoughts in his mind, behind him; to feel that he was getting on, at least in space and time, if not in more substantial ways; and with the hope — always that inextinguishable hope — that, around the corner, he would encounter Something — that always possible, always to-be-looked-for Something, which would change his life.

Perhaps he was right. Hopes, the least reasonable in the world, have been known to be the truest counsellors. Few but can recall some darkened hour of

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life when the outer voices were a perfect harmony of foreboding, and only one still, small tone within denied their prophecy, and did not cease until, in time, their din was silenced by the unforeseen.

So, now, to Jeremy, against those outer facts of his impending failure in the very hour of his greatest need, there was but one — one single stubborn fact in either world of his, that strove against accumulating doubts and fears. It was that solitary Voice within, which no one but himself could hear; which spoke to him alone, and in that language which all men understand, but no man has the power to utter. Some say it is the voice of God; others that it is the speech of angels. However that may be, and however it be heard — whether in faith, or only in wonder, or even in doubt — so long as he is listening, man knows it for his native tongue. Speech of some far, fair country, falling as music upon his exiled ear.

But meanwhile — *meanwhile*, he asked the Voice, could one live on hope? *Eat* hope, *pay* hope? . . .

It is the old question, and the old voice answers it, in the old, old fashion, as mysteriously, as ceaselessly, as the flight of time: denying nothing, but affirming, affirming, and still affirming, ever and forever, in the face of reason, in the face of facts, and in the face of

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man, and the whole inexorable outer world of outer Law — Hope, Hope, Hope — *Hope*, with every throb of the human heart! Hope, with every beat of the winging moments! — as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

Jeremy was silent.

But the Voice was not. It was still speaking when he turned into a wretched street to which he had been sent. And when he entered a crowded tenement, pushing his way through an awestruck throng upon the walk, and climbed the stairs, and knocked at a door with crêpe upon its knob, still was that murmur in his ear. Still was a whisper there when he emerged, and hurried back, out of that squalid mourning, to write the old, old story of man's hopelessness.

Yet he shuddered as he wrote; and turned, heartsick, from the familiar words that stared so blackly at him out of the printed page that evening:

### *Suicide — Out of Work*

Foolish words! Even to-day he knew that they were so. And yet — to-day, of all days in his life, there was a grim reality in foolishness. Even in another's. And, with a kind of horror, Jeremy turned from it, as from his own.

The day was drawing to a close, when, grimy with the dust with which the wind smote him, almost blinding him as he came into his familiar quarter of the town, and deafened by the din of traffic there, Jeremy reached at last that time-stained row of dilapidated dwellings where he lodged. The room under the eaves was stifling, but it was a refuge from the ceaseless glare and turmoil down below, in which it was so difficult to think, and so impossible to plan.

He threw himself, face downward, on the bed. In the demoralization of defeat — that first fatigue of body, and utter bewilderment of thought and will — it was easiest, thus, to shut out the dingy cheerlessness of the place. Those faded wall-flowers, and tattered curtains, and all the coffin-coloured furniture in which old boarding-houses are the graves of departed pomp and pride, perpetual warnings to their inhabitants that all things shine awhile, only to end in gloom and dust.

Lying there, the city became a murmur and a memory. But there also, in that refuge, neither of space, nor time — that freedom which man seeks vainly in a world whose law is limitation — that inwardness to which, in the instincts of divinity, he

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turns from an environment that seems, sometimes, a soulless mechanism and inquisition of malevolence — there also, even there, the light had vanished! What, that morning, had been all abloom and sparkling with the dew of hope, had faded, in those few brief intervening hours, to an inexplicable desolation. Every fountain had ceased to play — every singing sound of winds and waters slept, now, in silence.

It was that Silence in which he who hath ears, hears — voices of mystery.

*"Thou fool!"* they said to him. And, over and over, he heard —

*"Fool, Fool, Fool that thou art! See, now, what comes of dreaming!"*

In all that mocking chorus there was not one single friendly accent to be heard. Where, he wondered, was the God of dreamers? And the angels that are said to watch over the foolish children of this underworld? *Who* cared? . . . Two women! — that was all.

Two mortals, now. Some day, perhaps, one more, created in his very image — another dreamer, drunken with a wine not made with hands, but lying in some gutter of the solid earth — would care! and curse him for that heritage of moonshine.

Even his body trembled! The remembrance of that

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other dreamer, blissfully asleep as yet, was in itself almost a prayer that he might never waken, who was now so safe from pain, so innocent of folly! It was the first of that sudden throng of bat-winged creatures who sleep in light, but flit in the darkness of blighted gardens. Black thoughts and wishes, from whose apparition he recoiled; unbidden guests to whom he shut his eyes, and whom he drove back, blindly, into those haunted shades from which they came to him.

And then it was that his very soul cried out to the mystery about him: a cry that echoed and reechoed, in the silence, with a sound like laughter. . . . Then all was still again.

But it was a strange stillness! Not like the other, when, still on the confines of that world which he had left behind, he could hear its murmuring — silent now, and utterly forgot. Even those mocking voices were no longer heard, in this oblivion, this sudden hush, and calm, which had befallen him. He was alone — alone, and *safe!* Not only men, but those haunting shapes of evil — Envy, and Pride, and Fear, and all the rest of that dark band by which he was assailed — had vanished, now. He was alone, at last. Yet *not* alone! . . . For, all about him, in their stead, hovered a white-winged host of peace!

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Silently, invisibly, they had come to him in answer to his cry. Healing presences, and still, small voices of good cheer, out of the past, with its hard-won wisdom; out of the present, with its priceless treasures of love and hope; out of the future, also — that unknown future, which surely must be safe and fair, when its very threshold was so thronged with angels!

Never before in this enchanted circle of the soul, this dream within a dream, had he known seclusion, or immunity, or love, like this — this secret of the garden's heart.

And this was a beginning! Who could say what depths of stillness and security there might be here, waiting for his need! What splendid answers waiting for his cry!

It came to him how often he had heard of this; how little he had heeded what man had said, and sung of it, from the beginning. And it was true! — true as ever, that for every dreamer there is a refuge long hidden from himself; and seldom found until all other ways are desolate. True that there are voices there — speech that no language can interpret, but every listening ear may understand; and wings on which all sinking, failing, dying things are lifted into life again!

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For Jeremy — so new to this, so wondering, and amazed — it was a mystery too strange and fair for words, or even for his thought. He only knew that now, in those familiar places, so lately desolate, he found old hopes abloom, old fountains playing!

And as he rose up from his knees, there in the twilight of his room, he listened fearlessly to the city's murmuring.

## IX

### WAYFARERS

FROM those mysterious refuges, lovely and unlovely, where men dwell apart, meeting in a common world in which they are but phantoms of themselves, and their temporal drama is but a play of shadows — the reflection of unseen realities, more fair, more terrible — they come each morning into the market-place seemingly so like each other that only a sinner who is something of a saint as well can guess the divinity in the throng. For only kindness has eyes for kindness, faith for faith, hope for hope.

To-day mankind was tenderer than ever it had been before. Its very ugliness was fair: not with mere radiance of the sun, but with a light that no one in all those hurrying thousands could possibly have had eyes for, unless — like Jeremy — that morning, and for the first time, he had become a father! The father of a son!

A certain blindness, now, was gone forever. He

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could see in the men about him, in the women whom he passed, in the children whom he paused to smile at, things that belied the hardness and indifference in those elder faces; and in those younger ones, in their play and wonder, something shining, that grime, or hunger, or disease itself, no longer hid from him — something helpless that stirred his heart. For in the news from Toodlums, not he alone, but every man had suddenly become a father! Every woman was a mother now; and every child was, in some trembling sense, his own.

It had brought him nearer to his fellows, strangely nearer. In this new kinship, their hidden lives would never be again the mystery they had been before. He could guess more easily their secret joys and sorrows: those light hopes, and those heavy burdens, with which they passed him in the street. Their strife for bread; the eagerness with which they fought for more than they would ever need themselves; their thwarted hopes, and their hard dilemmas, and, in utter weariness, or chagrin, or fear, their desperate sacrifice of unseen birthrights for a pottage that is made with hands — all these cried out unto his pity. Always they had touched, but never had they thrilled him until now he, also, felt white arms clinging to his

frailty; and his heart all trembling, even in its joy, with the knowledge of those precious futures entangled with his own.

He laid the message upon the desk of his friend, the Editor, without a word. The other read it once, twice, thrice, before he raised his eyes to those youthfully parental ones. Even then it was with the slightly embarrassed air of elder fathers that he offered his congratulations; and he added what, perhaps, might better have been left unsaid —

“Now, of course, you have *got* to find yourself!”

— which was undeniable.

As yet, in his letters to Barbara, he had written nothing of his impending fate. It would be time enough when he could both propound the question of their future, and answer it, at once; and with something more than this indefinite but persistent hope in which he gazed about him for some new way forward.

But it was the old way that still seemed likeliest. If he could find, somehow, somewhere, in all this tumult and confusion, some true story, some tale to write — some little chapter out of that divine romance to which he was awakening — *that* seemed the surest, indeed the only way, in which to find himself.

For he was still, despite his failure to impress the

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world, a novelist. One trifling published story, it was true, was the merest promise of fulfilment, in that oldest, fondest, loveliest of all his dreams. The friend who had edited his news from Toodlumshire had already written books. Even so, Jeremy also was to live and die a novelist. Because it was so that he had seen, always, that spiritual hero inhabiting his dream of self: that ideal Jeremy, whose form and stature, whose mien and movement, whose very mind and soul, he was forever striving, consciously, and unconsciously as well, to realize, though with such fortune as has been seen. Illusion or not, and however to be accounted for, it was the pitch to which he tuned his life — heart-strings to harp-strings. And whether it was because the harmony was untrue, or because his playing was unskilful, or that for those who listened the melody was too familiar, or too new and strange, it would be hard to say; but, somehow, the music of his life seemed never to awaken those answering echoes that he longed to hear.

There were echoes that he failed to hear, because they were not the ones for which he listened. Echoes that, from first to last — and for all that Barbara could protest in that clear audition of her love — he never dreamed of. Echoes that still are to be heard, and

that still are musical, in a world where, failing as a novelist, he accounted himself, and was by others also accounted, in that world's wisdom, a failure as a man, as well.

## II

Seated one evening by that upper window where he and Barbara had gazed so often at the stars, he had been thinking of Toodlums: a thousand wistful thoughts that wandered even to the little river there, and to the woods where, in that very hour, he knew the thrushes would be singing. And as he dwelt upon old half-forgotten things, the new, by contrast, seemed doubly sad.

Doubts had come creeping in again — those shadows fatal even to the divine romance. The vision of it was so hard to keep — that vision of life's higher dignity, in its lower shame and mockery of defeat; of its light, in darkness; of its wealth, in poverty; of its eternal safety, in mortal perils of pain and fear. Faith he knew — faith, and its adventurous daring — was the secret of Romance. Of all Romance, human and divine. But how was he to keep that faith? — that perfect freedom — in these fetters of inglorious Space, and inexorable Time? That largeness, in this littleness!

It would be easier, he told himself, if he but had

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some surer foothold on the solid earth — easier in honour, or in ownership, to keep that splendid feeling of the universe. And that heroic sense of all eternity — if fourteen days of it were not so paramount!

They passed so swiftly that they left him numb. It was a paralysis of doubt and fear. Before his very eyes Romance was dying. Soon there would be no more poetry, no story worth the telling, left. Daily, he had sought, and waited; watched, and listened: but all in vain. To his dazed senses the world about him, brushing him, jostling him, deafening, blinding him, was but a foolish uproar: all mad and meaningless confusion; and man, to his bewildered reason, seemed but a leaf whirled, helpless, in some ceaseless gale.

Nightly, there by that upper window, he had striven to revive old visions — to conjure up that former bloom and glamour, which he had seen upon this very world. It would not return — not even to his imagination. His very pen, it seemed to him, balked at those words that were no longer true.

But when he tried to say what now appeared to him as truth — tried to find words for that benighted scene and setting, and for the warp and woof of that interminable plot, in which it seemed to him that his and all men's helpless lives were being woven: when he

tried to find a story even in his failure and despair — his pen dropped from his fingers. . . . Perhaps that, also, was not true.

Then what? What could he count upon as true?

It was then that his thoughts turned home to Toodlums. He could count, always, upon two women — and that other dreamer there, scarcely as yet awake. Those three, at least — mother, and wife, and child. Little enough of truth and beauty to be sure of! — but all that man has ever needed to keep him safe. In gathering shadows, it is to love — always to love — that he goes back, to find the light again. The light of faith and its romance.

But now, to-night, just when that light began to dawn again upon the darkened world, and life, with all its failures and its disappointments, and its impending peril, seemed, once more to him, a divine adventure in which, to-morrow, he was to rise again, and gird himself with unseen might, to play the hero in the man — just then the Devil was at Jerry's ear.

The Devil, it is said, is dead; or was never aught but a nightmare of man's childhood dreams. However that may be, that dark, eternal truth which never dies, and which waits and watches, sleepless, lest man in his weakness and despair should pluck up heart

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again, was there. And I like the old names, for the old truths, best.

"Ah, yes," it whispered, "for *some* men, life is a romance. *Some* men are heroes . . . "

The pause was eloquent.

"Even *you* might have been — perhaps. To be born again, it is now a little late, my friend . . . but you might try!"

The silence was profound.

"You have three days left. Three whole days in which to give the lie to ages — think of that! To generations upon generations of sin and folly, of which you are the flower! The lovely flower!"

Jerry almost laughed himself. The Devil did!

Dreamer that he was, he had never thought of it before: that, for some men, hope is such sublime presumption!

"I see, my friend, that you are not so childish as is generally supposed. You are growing up. You are beginning to observe and reason. Mark you, now, what I should hardly have said to you before. You would not have understood me. You are seeking Freedom. You want to be unshackled from these petty miseries of time and space. Why, so did that other wise man — that other dreamer, the other day!

You remember him — or what was left of him. The man out of work. With him, also, it was a little matter of, say, three out of fourteen days. *He* found release. . . .

"Ah, well, of course, don't think of it again. It is not to be expected that one of your peculiar sensibilities — the flower of so delicate a race of heroes! — would have the heart, or hand, for so violent an adventure."

"But the next best freedom is in your very line! All the poets, all the dreamers in the world, have sung of it — the Freedom of the Road! Had you never thought of *that*? Why, there's the door! Beyond it the whole earth lies — yours, every road of it! Yours, every day of it! — to dream in. Every night! — without a ghost of care. And poverty — that blessed poverty of the saints and poets! without a need beyond the bread they'll give you, never fear — for Christ's sake!"

"Eh? . . . *That* would be Romance! Wandering up and down the earth, with, every new day, new adventures! — new dreams, every hour! Old dreams, too — dreams, remember, that you never *asked* to dream: gifts, surely, from a God of Freedom!"

"And as for love — why, if you love them so, why

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burden them so heavily, with all this weight of *your* bewilderment, *your* incompetence? Those dear to you will live more safely when you are gone. Pity will be kind to them: kinder than Folly! For them also — listen but a moment longer: the truth's soon told — for them, also, Freedom! And out of their lives your own will fade as a dream; and as a dream their lives will fade from yours; and in the end . . . well, as to that, my friend, where the beginning was so easy that no one remembers it, surely one may be quite comfortable about the end!"

The voice was silent.

All the while, even when it spoke most movingly, Jeremy had heard, beneath its clear discourse, that other still, small voice of hope. Now, in the quiet, it had a warning sound. Or, rather, it was not the sound itself — it was its ceaselessness that made him listen. . . .

"Why do you hesitate?" whispered that bolder voice again. "What you hear is but the beating of your own heart! And when your heart stops — *fif!* — the little voice stops too!"

"It *might* not." . . . Jeremy was listening.

"Bah!" said the Devil. "What are you afraid of? An old wife's tale, to frighten children with! I've

told you where the stories are. You'll never find one here."

"I *may*." . . . Jeremy was listening still.

The Devil laughed.

"*You!*" he cried. "You are a pretty hero! A very flower of romance, eh? Take my advice, and be off with you, before it is too late."

There was a moment's silence.

"Well, then," said the Devil, "*stay* — and be damned!"

And as he stayed — seemingly so solitary, so dumb, so motionless, so utterly remote from crisis and decision, from stir and action, from the thrill and drama of what men call Life — lost, seemingly, in the shadows of its prose, without a gleam of its poetry and romance — every muscle that men strive with was stretched and strong! And every nerve with which they fire their clay, for use and service — even for the merest hope of some diviner purpose than they know — was like a flame!

### III

Seated there among the presences and voices of the larger life, he was conscious of a new one entering through that very door whose way to freedom he

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had declined. It was open for the solace of the breeze that floated through the window and passed on into the hall from which the phantom came — rustling in, without a word of greeting, and seating itself among the evening shadows, in Barbara's chair.

He said nothing, and but turned his head. As for the ghost, the moonlight told him who it was — one of those mysterious beings who haunt old boarding-houses, coming and going as silently as now, at all hours of the day and night; and variously explicable, according to one's gift of vision. This one dwelt across the hall. He had seen her on the stairs, where she might indeed have been a ghost, for aught he knew of her; and he had been, at times, conscious of her apparition in the dining-room below, where spectres are unlikely visitors. And he had heard her name.

Taking her for granted, as she had taken him, he said nothing. He was becoming used to uninvited guests. This one spoke at last, softly, in the merest reverie of voice.

“I knew that you would understand.”

“Oh!” he answered.

“It isn't every one that does, is it?” inquired the same calm tone of confidence; and now there was a

stir beside him, and some faint, exotic perfume in the air. "I knew *you* would. I knew it the first day that I saw you."

"How — how did you know?"

"It was in your face. You didn't look at me as other men."

He had hardly looked at her at all. Nor could he remember when they met; or where.

"It was on the steps. I knew at once that I had nothing — "

She paused, and, for the first time, turned upon him the mystery of her eyes.

"— nothing," she repeated gratefully, "to fear. You pitied me. I saw it in your face."

It was very possible, of course.

"You understood how I had suffered."

This was news, indeed!

"You read me at a glance. I knew, then, that concealment was impossible. That we were to be friends — always!"

She confessed all this in a breathless undertone that Jeremy had heard before, though only at the theatre.

"Why are you silent?" she demanded. "You are lonely."

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He hesitated.

"Yes," he said.

"And sad."

Again he hesitated.

"Yes."

"Why?" she asked. And, as he was silent, she answered for him, in a kindly way. "You have many cares."

"Nothing but will pass."

"How do you know that they will pass?"

"Things change," he answered, "when it is darkest."

"Ah, but the time comes when they never change!"  
she told him sadly. "You see, I know!"

His heart reproached him.

"I'm sorry," he replied, touched by the sudden thought of how much more hopeless and forbidding even than to himself, the world must seem to lonely women. Women, he thought — he thought so to the end — were infinitely more sensitive to life than men; infinitely more tender-hearted, and more fair and delicate of mind as they were of flesh; and more pure of vision. He had never doubted it; and always as he looked into their eyes, or watched them in their silences, he had felt a shame before those thoughts that he could only guess, but that he fancied were a

kind of garden, more springlike than his own. He had always thought of it as morning there, with something of childhood lingering like dew; or evening, with its maternal hush; or, if the flowers ever drooped or withered in the heat of noon, or fell beneath the wrath and torment of the storm — they did, sometimes, he knew — heat and storm were of that outer world, where women, he believed, were always strangers like himself. Barbara, surely, had never roused him from that dream. And now beside him was another woman, vaguely young, and dimly fair, who had faced that world, before which even his coarser strength had quailed. Remembering his weakness now with shame, his heart went out to her.

"You have friends," he said.

She seemed to shrink from the very word.

"*Friends!*"

"Ah, then," he said, at once, "you must know Barbara!"

She shook her head.

"Women do not care for women."

"Barbara will care!"

"Perhaps. I'd rather trust the sympathy of a man. Not all men," she added, quickly — and then with a touch of irony, "one in ten thousand, perhaps! Some

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one like you — a dreamer. I knew you were a dreamer, that day upon the steps."

"But Barbara," he began — and stopped instinctively; but wondering that any one who had seen, could question Barbara.

"I don't doubt that she is all you say. But she wouldn't care for me."

"Why?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"Perhaps I would."

"No. You are an idealist."

"If that is true, wouldn't that be a reason," he suggested, "for understanding?"

She seemed to hesitate.

"Well — let me see whether you are a true idealist . . . I don't believe in anything, you know. I don't believe in God, and I don't believe in man — not even in idealists. Men are all alike — sensualists. Idealists are esthetic sensualists, that is all. You see, I know. My husband was a rake. And as for women — we are all alike, too. The only difference is that some of us are legally good, and the rest of us are — illegally bad. . . . What do you say to that?"

"I say," Jeremy made answer, without an instant's

hesitation, and in a tone of passionate protest, "that you don't believe anything of the kind!"

She clapped her hands.

"*Ab!* What did I tell you? You *are* — you are a true idealist! But I do believe it — what I said just now."

"You may try to believe that you believe it," he acknowledged, "but your heart tells you that it isn't so."

"My heart! What do you know about my heart? When I meet one single man in all the universe that I can trust — not merely *say* I trust —"

"I don't doubt," Jeremy interposed, "that you have been unfortunate in others. But how can you despair of goodness, so long as there is any in yourself?"

"There *isn't* any in myself."

"Ah, but you are wrong!"

"What right have you to say that? What do you know about myself? *How* do you know?"

"I know," he answered, "because in my own heart there are places — places," he confessed, "that I would not be ashamed to have you see. Have I any right to suppose that there are not those places in others also?"

And as she was silent, he added musingly:

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"The unexplored country seems to be within us. It is a strange country, and we know very little about it yet; only, the more one travels there, the more it seems to be one's native land — it is so full of hope."

"You have been very fortunate," she murmured.  
"How happy you must be!"

Jeremy was silent.

"You are one of those lucky persons," she continued, "whom the fairies and the angels watch, and the stars guide. Who never know pain or failure — or wrong — or tears. I have heard of such persons. But I never met one before."

And she added, bitterly:

"It is easy for you to have faith in things!"

"Perhaps," he answered, "it is not so easy as you think."

"Ah, yes, I know. You said that you were sad, and lonely. You feel sadness; but you don't *know* sadness. Or loneliness. You don't *know* struggle, and pain, and wrong, and fear. Some day, perhaps, you will be deserted by all those lovely hopes of yours; and the world that you talk of will seem very far away from you, then, and like a dream . . . *Then* you will know!"

They were both silent. And then, suddenly, to

his astonishment, she arose and gave her hand to him, in token of surrender.

"Well," she said to him, with charming candour, and in that former, kindlier voice, "I'll begin all over again — by believing in *you!*"

She felt his hands tremble at her touch.

"You must do nothing so — foolish!" he protested.

"*Ab!*" she laughed softly. "So it seems that I am not to trust you, after all!"

Jeremy was silent. And she divined, easily enough, what manner of silence it was that held him — one of those crucial silences in which a voice, or the merest shadow of a voice, may end the balance, once, and sometimes forever.

"But how, then, shall I begin all over again," she asked plaintively, "if I cannot believe in *you?* You, of all men — an idealist!"

The silence was profound.

"By believing in yourself!" he at last made answer in a desperate voice.

"*Bab!*" she cried, petulantly, jerking her hand away. "I tell you, you don't know anything about myself! I didn't come here ——"

She whipped out a cigarette, and lighted it, so that for an instant, while the match was flaming, her face

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with all its scorn, but all its lingering and still hopeful youth as well, was suddenly revealed to him. And then, in the shadows again, as she leaned back against the open window, her defiant head was outlined against the sky.

"I didn't come here to be believed in. And, for that matter, you seemed just now a little doubtful of yourself!"

"I know!" he answered; and his shame touched in her heart those very chords that she denied. "I didn't say," he reminded her, "that faith in one's self was easy. And it was you, remember, who said that I didn't know . . . what struggle was!"

"Yes," she acknowledged . . . "and I was wrong."

With exquisite care — as if it were the very silence that she feared to break — she laid down her cigarette.

"Nevertheless," she told him, giving him her hand again in new surrender, and in farewell, "I shall begin just as I said I would! Yes!" she insisted — and he never knew that she was crying softly to herself — "by believing . . . in the first idealist . . . I ever met!"

## X

### ANGELS

THOSE fourteen days in which he was to find himself, who never would be aught but what he was and had been always from the beginning, were quickly past. But Time was kind to him: kinder than man. Jeremy awoke to find a fifteenth day — and then a sixteenth. While there was light to dawn, even though it always faded, it was yet too early to despair.

He had been sending out those old neglected manuscripts again, and while, in their former fashion, they were coming home to him, still, faithful to his dream of authorship, he was sitting there under the eaves, waiting, waiting — waiting in light, and waiting in darkness — before that blank white paper of his storyless and unromantic, unheroic hope.

And it was curious, then — one of those spiritual ironies of life akin to its outward and visible derisions — that, pen in hand, in this eleventh hour of his need,

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his desperate and tortured mind could conjure up for him nothing but the airiest phantasies — mere butterflies of thought, that, in pretty little sunlit scenes of peace and joy, flitted, here and there, among the fragrant flowers of his fancy. Even while the active world roared warnings from below, or when he started up involuntarily from his chair at some apparition of remembrance — some grim reminder that time would not be always kind, and that a day of reckoning was at hand — Jeremy would dip his pen and nerve himself again with set teeth and frowning determination, only to visualize some tranquil garden — some bliss of life, sequestered from its storm! Pictures of country quiet, of little rivers meandering in meadows, of roofs and towers among distant trees, and youthful lovers under hawthorn boughs: all these returned to him out of forgotten dreams. They were those English vistas that he had seen while yet a lad, in Toodlumshire, looking up from the pages of old English verse, to wish and wonder. And now when, a lad no longer among the bees and roses, he faced what men face, there, in his city cell, back they came again, unsummoned; and still so beautiful, and so useless for any purpose of the hour, for any story but his own! Haunting visions of the peace men dream of from the first,

and seek unto the end, and find sometimes — but not in the gardens which they saw as boys.

Perhaps, however, they were not so purposeless as they had seemed: those pretty, little, wistful dreams of earthly refuge from care and sorrow. It was, from the first, their very uselessness, and hopelessness, and that very irony of their comparison with all the unlovely and unkempt realities of life, so utterly un-gardenlike, that had made him turn from them at last, in pain, only to discern in joy his first dim visions of a surer sanctuary. And now, once more, it was their very mockery that was kind to him — the untimeliness of their sad reminders that made him turn, and turn again, to visions of greener pastures and stiller waters. For, in this valley of the shadow, as he sought for light in the wisdom that other men had found in darkness, nothing they had ever said, or sung, brought half the cheer that shone for him in words that, as a little child, he had been permitted to recite each morning in the school at Toodlums. They were not the wisdom that was taught there, day by day, class by class, room by room, carefully, insistently, as essential armour for these battles with the world. They were but slight concessions to an ancient but now doubtful faith, not indeed to be taught at all,

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on pain of popular displeasure, but of which some frugal morsels now and then might do no harm, perhaps, before the real work of the day began.

But, now, in another of life's kindly ironies, face to face with the ancient problem of existence, every book that he had ever laboured over—all those studies in which, one proud spring day, he had been pronounced proficient, and ready for the world, and all those others that he had loved—were dumb! To his troubled mind, the brightest jewels among all its treasures now were words that he had learned by rote——

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. . . .*

For as he told them over, word by word, bead by bead in the rosary of remembrance, their ancient loveliness seemed now a music not of speech, but life! It was not his own voice merely that he heard. It was the voice of Man, from the beginning, singing out of age-long joy and sorrow, that childlike chant. Singing in innocence—not any longer in ignorance of life, but in that wisdom of it which men call Faith: a diviner innocence to which they, spiritually, are born again; and in which, as children of a childhood that need never vanish, an eternal kingdom has been promised them.

Even the darkness had not been purposeless if this light, which was born of it, was true. Words never meant so much to him before. If untrue—well, then . . . but they were *not* untrue! As men say, *Something* told him that. *Something* strangely swift and tender, winging its unseen way out of the inmost silence; lighting as it came his troubled thoughts, until they shone; and as it stayed, calming their strife, and the very beating of his heart, until, in stillness, he could hear again those voices which are lost in storm. It was that shining *Something* that always came to him in eleventh hours, when the last mere reasonable hope had fled. *Something* final, that had never failed him yet; that would not leave him in extremity, nor let him go. And in answer to whose watch and ward his wistful life had found a voice at last in words that he repeated as a child, telling them over as aves and paternosters of his helplessness.

And if the psalm was true, then he was safe! Now, and always—in green pastures, and beside still waters; yea, but in valleys, also, of the shadows of all those deaths men die to find themselves, he need have no fear. Not even in *this* darkness, *this* silence, in which he waited—this risk and recklessness in which he hazarded his life and love, all that was dear to him,

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in the adventure of a last fond faith — and felt again the first faint thrill, and saw once more the dawning glamour, of Romance!

These, verily, are they to whom the angels minister: who are led through days of weariness by clouds, and through nights of anguish by pillars of strange fire; and who are fed with manna in the wilderness. For, there where no human footfall was ever heard, and where the very beating of his heart was of the outer world — there where the real Jeremy, as Barbara had seen, was some one nobler even than that ideal Jeremy of his earthly quest — who but angels could have found their way to him? And if not angels, who were They that took each night from him, upon his knees, those dying hopes of his, and gave them back again, restored to life, against the morrow?

### II

To those who knew — Barbara as yet knew nothing — it seemed sheer madness, his waiting there, day after day, striving with those foolish pages — filling them desperately, if only to see some mark, some sign upon them of what he waited for; but only to crush them in his hands at last, and wait again, and strive, and wait, day after day, before that blank white

surface of mere hope. And it was now that they began to find those verdicts, which, according to their lights, still lie like shadows upon his memory. He was a dreamer, an illusionist, a child, a fool. To all their counsels he listened helplessly. From all their silences, so much more eloquent with scorn or pity than any words they uttered, he turned away into that silence of his own. What he saw there, or what he heard, they could not guess.

But they were strangely moved.

"If he wants to make a fool of himself," one of them protested wrathfully, "I can't help it. I've done what I could. I've warned, I've lectured him. I've told him what to do to save himself. Yet he goes on living in his fool's paradise. What right has he to make me care?"

The speaker paused. Slowly a puzzled look came into his defiant eyes, which lost their anger; his voice was softened.

"But I *do* care. That's what I cannot understand."

That was what none could understand, just yet — the mystery of those silent, those insistent, never to be quite stifled promptings from within, to rescue one who had no further claim upon them before the law of men! For it was not mere pity. They pitied many whom

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they felt no charge to keep from sorrow or disaster. Why, indeed, should they care so much? Here was but one more failure in a busy world; and the folly was his own.

Yet they did care!

It was as if — one likes to think thus of it — Some one cared, Who had given His angels charge concerning him: so that the hearts of men were stirred and troubled by presences that were all unseen, and by unheard voices that would not cease, lest, in his helplessness, he dash his foot against a stone!

One Sunday there came a knock upon his door. Jeremy opened it to find, to his surprise, his friend the Editor. Yet not the Editor. In the kindly but hesitating figure that crossed his threshold, and that sat, awkwardly, and rather silently at first, in Barbara's chair, it was hard to realize the monarch of affairs before whom Jeremy had always trembled. Now, indeed, it was the Editor who was ill at ease, and who stammered in his speech.

"I was passing," he explained, "and just dropped in —" which was not quite true. "I thought I'd inquire how you were getting on."

"Oh," Jeremy made answer, "things look more hopeful now."

"You have found a place?"

"No."

"You have one in view, perhaps?"

"No. I meant —"

He brushed an imaginary speck upon his coat, and added slowly,

“— that I had found myself!”

Both were silent. Then the Editor remarked suggestively,

"You are writing, I see."

"Yes. . . . Always writing."

Jeremy smiled, with a furtive glance at the crumpled papers on the table and on the floor. It was a half-embarrassed, half-defiant smile. And there was another pause in which the elder man gazed helplessly at the younger, who looked very white and worn, he thought, like one who had rather lost than found himself. He was not unkempt; he was clean and shaven. But there were deep lines about the mouth and between the faded eyes, which were strained and swollen.

"I have caught cold," Jeremy explained in answer to the other's inquiry.

"So I see," the Editor replied, quietly. "Writing is a catarrahal sort of thing, sometimes."

Jeremy surrendered.

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"Oh, something will come of it!" he said wearily. "At times one is baffled, of course. That's life, I take it. But there is nothing —"

He looked up smilingly.

"There is nothing *final* in defeat. That's what I tell myself, over and over. It is curious, isn't it, that we should always have to keep reminding ourselves of the things that are — helpful? It is the hopeless, the disheartening things, that are so easy to recall."

And he went on talking. It was not so much that the Editor was inclined to silence now, as that Jeremy felt bound, somehow, to speak — partly for self-expression, long pent up in lonely labour, and partly doubtless in self-defence; but partly also in instinctive dread of what this other man might say, out of the hard philosophy of success.

"Life's an adventure," Jeremy soliloquized, with a strange half-light in his eyes and smile. It was — prematurely in one so young — that twilight which is sometimes to be seen in faces, when invading shadows have conquered life's blaze and heat, but pause, baffled by a remnant glow that will not yield itself, nor die, but that lingers on, illuminating the night. It is a kind of starlight.

"I am just beginning," Jeremy confessed, slowly, idling with his pen, "to see the — the drama and romance of life: this struggling on, sword in hand, and wounded sometimes, and mighty weak, against . . . Once seeing it, of course — once catching it, I mean, the —"

He groped vaguely for the word. ]

"—the *nobility*," he said at last, "even in the things we call ignoble; in the commonplace and prose of life — you know what I mean. Once catching gleams where everything, we thought, was shadow; once seeing life as a splendid and mysterious quest, and man as —"

He paused again, and the glow deepened in his careworn face, so that it lost its homeliness.

"God's own knight!" he said, breathlessly. "Once seeing *that*, one knows what one must do! Fight on, and —"

He dropped his eyes.

"— fail, perhaps — it is the lot of some. But *never* yield, *never* surrender!"

His pale face flushed a little under the Editor's silent scrutiny.

"It isn't egotism; it isn't bravado," he declared. "I know that I am one of the least knightly of men,

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one of the weakest vessels of so high a chivalry. One that some dragon will be gulping down, perhaps, one of these days — flesh and blood — but not quite all of me. I'll warrant there'll be something left, to fight on — somewhere. But at any rate — *this* is the point," he said, looking the other straight and steadily in the eyes, and speaking now in that exalted and unanswerable tone which men never use save in their high decisions, "I have made up my mind. Right or wrong, I have made up my mind about life — *forever!* It's my last dream. And if I'm wrong . . . well, if I'm wrong," he added passionately, "all I can say is, I'd rather be Man, and go down to mockery and defeat in an error so supremely beautiful, than be the God of any scheme of things less kind and fair!"

"Ladd," said the Editor, for Jeremy was silent now — now that he had set up his standard, so to speak, and given warning that he would not compromise with life, whatever it might do with him — "Ladd," said the Editor, very gently, like a father speaking to a son whom he at once admonishes and admires, "I think you're right. You've found the epic where you used to find the lyric life. And now the practical question is, What *is* your sword! Your sword?"

He hesitated.

"Is it," he asked at last, striving to temper doubt with his compassion — speaking with downcast eyes, and in a lowered voice, as if, in this sanctuary of a young man's faith, he was fearful lest a word or a mis-tone might mar some irrevocable loveliness — "is it, are you sure, your pen?"

Jeremy was silent. He rose and walked across the room, standing for a moment, with his back to the questioner. Then he turned and came back slowly to the table littered with his futile toil; and seeing it, he could not trust his voice at first. But presently he said huskily,

"It's the only sword I know!"

The Editor was silent. Finally he arose, and placing his hands on Jerry's shoulders,

"My boy," he said, "I don't know what to say, or do, for you. You are one of those men that the world never does know what to make of, but is bound, somehow, in spite of everything, to respect and love; and leave, more or less, to the mercy of the angels — if there *are* angels! I'm blest if I know. I've never believed in them, myself. But if there are —"

He smiled, and there was a suspicion of moisture in his eyes as with a kind of rude tenderness he shook Jeremy, in token of affection and farewell.

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"Well, if there are, why—you are the kind of fellow they'll take care of! I'm sure of that."

He went away, suddenly, as he had come. After he was gone, Jeremy, turning sadly to his work again, saw among his papers a sum of money! In his amazement, his first thought was to call. . . . But it had not been lost.

In one sense it was little. But in another, measured by the secret need of that eleventh hour—not by its darkness, merely, which had been seen, but by its unguessed hunger of starved flesh and blood—it was so much, he wept!

Angels indeed!—knocking unasked, unwelcome, from door to door, from heart to heart; and at their opening, and before they can be shut again, flooding them with light of a divine compassion, so that men find themselves, even against will and reason, loving their neighbour as themselves!

### III

In his own way—that timid, childlike, unwordly, unpractical way which is so inexplicable and contemptible to men who fall upon their feet, who never are at a loss to make themselves useful to their fellows, or their fellows useful to themselves—Jeremy was

groping for employment. The truth was, he had no imagination in these material things. His visions were of nothing that is made with hands. Men looked askance at him. Just what was alien in him he could not tell, any more than they; but he noticed that they eyed him curiously, and listened to him silently, as if he were a stranger. He would have been amazed, had he been told that he did not even speak their language! Yet it was true. They would have better understood him, had he come to them in their homes, instead of in their shops and offices; if he could have appealed to them in those quiet places where they kept their secret treasures, which neither moth, nor rust, nor thieves might touch, and where even the sternest of them were sometimes children. There he would have been at home: more at home even than themselves. His genius was for intimacy. His errors were of the market-places, never of the shrines of life. For sanctuaries, seen and unseen, he had the gifts both of speech and silence.

Perhaps already he was employed. Perhaps he had been employed always, from the first, and would be employed until the end — or, at least, so long as he could keep that light of faith which transfigured his futility — giving, for that was what he did, what

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other shrewder men contrive to sell. If this was so, he was not aware of it. He was looking still for a kingdom more visible than that. He only knew that, coming each morning into the market-place, at whose more fragrant stalls men buy a little, now and then, of the produce of kings' gardens, though warily and according to the fancy of the hour, he had found no purchasers. Jeremy, no more than the rest of us, in those days took account of what he gave away, freely, in the sheer joy of giving, along the road. Treasures of the spirit, which come from mystery and go in mystery; which come from the illumined silences, and go in the light of them men shed in passing. So it was with him, though he never dreamed of it. Whatever his life had touched, it had illumined, though with unmarketable light. And in this last stand, waiting for his hidden fate, daring he knew not what, in that spirit of divine adventure which some call madness and some call faith, he had found himself again, who never would be aught but what he was and had been always, from the beginning. For always he had met each challenge of vicissitude with some new and chastened, but fragile and, as it always seemed, perishable dream of life — a new dream for each new chapter of experience. And always his latest hope

and view, when once it had dawned upon his darkness, putting it to flight, was a fairer, more extended prospect, than ever he had seen before.

It was an old, old road that he was journeying — the ancient way of the idealist: defying fate, and, though defeated, defeated always on his own high ground; and ever higher, so that each new reverse but marks a progress and ascent to some nobler level of adversity, until the final failure — and its Easter song!

As the Editor had said, Jeremy was one of those men whom the world never does know what to make of. For, not being cast in an heroic mould, there was no melodrama to arouse their latent sympathies, in his silent battlefields, his quiet life, and its veiled adventures. Those who were nearest only dimly guessed. And Jeremy himself, in spite of his dawning vision of the divine romance which is in every life, however humble, because his own life was not what he had dreamed it would be, never really dreamed of what it was. All men live stories; some men see them; fewer write them. But for all of these, life is but an hour, vision but a glimpse, and words but echoes of reality.

The world which lay below his fairer life, like a modern city seen from the terraces of the ancient hills — man's world, transient, but to be sternly

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reckoned with until he came into his royal heritage — was now as strange and disconcerting as an evil dream. Time had but deepened the sense of his alien presence there; so that, more and more, he had withdrawn into those garden silences that were always home to him. Life had dawned upon him in a reverie; in a reverie it was vanishing.

"He ought to have been endowed," some one remarked, sadly. "No poor man can afford to muse. He must be up and doing."

The hour was late, but Jeremy himself had wakened to this truth. Up and doing were what he wished to be, with all his soul — but how? He had tried to do; was striving still in the only way whose mysteries he knew, a little. And all that he accomplished were clearer visions, farther vistas, nobler dreams of a life in which he found no foothold that he could call his own!

It was not strange that, in his bewilderment, he turned gratefully to the night, in which man's world was hushed, and all that din of merciless reminders faded away into a starlit reverie like his own. He longed for it to come, welcomed its refuge of concealing shadows and opiate sleep; and when he woke, turned sadly from the light of another futile

morning, not in indolence but in sheer despair, closing his eyes again, and striving to drift back into that kind oblivion. Forgetfulness — man always turns to it when knowledge fails. Since Jeremy could find no answer to the riddle of his inefficiency, only to be deaf to it would be enough! Blind, seemingly, he had always been. Now, also, he was growing dumb. He spoke no more of that final faith of his, which, like all others that he had known, seemed only to have beguiled him deeper still into a folly that appeared predestined, it was so inextricably woven into the very fabric of his soul. Always he had failed. In that, at least, his life had been consistent. All those pretty little coloured lights of youth — will o' the wisps of sentiment and yearning; and all these later, nobler stars, that lead the strong unto the heights, had only mired him — as if high truth for some might be for others valleys of destruction.

And there had been no escape. However he had turned, however he had groped always for ascent, step by step, all the long way that he had come, he had descended! For here, upon the brink of unknown depths whose quicksands sank beneath his feet, he saw those solid heights that he had climbed; and lo! — they were but pale hill-shadows in fatal waters.

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Even when he roused himself, and told himself defiantly that he was wrong; that truth for the strong was truth for the weak as well, and that the psalm was true; that the Shepherd of lost sheep would rescue him at last, all in good time, if he would trust and wait — it was as if the voice were not his own. It was so faint and far. Or now, perhaps, he was too tired to listen any longer.

If he could sleep — that would be divine compassion now. All that he would ask of any shepherd: to be permitted to lie down beside still waters, and never rise, never know again this weary wakefulness.

But when he did sleep — from exhaustion —his head nodding as he wrote, until at last it sank down, down, among those white certificates of failure, resting at last upon his folded arms, it was not forgetfulness. Haunted, in anxious dreams, by phantoms of futility — preposterous crises of a troubled fancy in which he was forever struggling, but in vain, to break some bond that held him like a vise, while all the world looked on, aloof and smiling, watching curiously to see how it would end, and if his heart would break! — he would awake, starting up, trembling and weak with strife, and cold with fear, only to strive and fear again, in this other bondage. Perhaps it, also, was an evil dream!

Sometimes he said the psalm mechanically. Merely to speak faith seemed to revive it, faintly, even in despair. Once, in some sheer reaction of spent nerves, he rose suddenly from his chair, and seizing the half-written sheets before him, tore them into shreds. He was a failure. Well, then, he would *be* a failure. He would accept his fate, and drink it to the dregs. He would defy not only man, but God himself! He could understand why, in defeat, men turned to wantonness. And if it but hastened an inevitable destruction, was it not better than to die this lingering death? It had, at least, the virtue of activity. Unlike this passive grovelling in the dust, it did not await the end, but went forth to meet it with a certain grace and heroism in its defiance. There was drama in it that men could see, and pity; and romance, which, in good or evil, is only to be found in risk and recklessness.

But even as he thought of this, Jeremy was piecing together the papers in his hand. He knew — Something told him — that that alternative was not for him. For him, always, courage and gallantry, whether in victory or defeat, would be obscure, hidden from the world in noiseless battlefields like this; challenge and defiance, for good or evil, would be untrumpeted;

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he must rise, or fall, in the patience and the lonely silence of his dreams.

Truth to tell, Jeremy was already dying to that outer world, in which he always had been a stranger. This numbness in which he sat, dazed and motionless, in his room, vaguely aware of time and place, and mechanically responsive to its few demands, was that same detachment which come to most men in old age. Life seemed to be closing in around him. What little of the world was left was but a darkened garden of dim thoughts, memories mostly, in which he waited for he knew not what — it did not matter — but it was coming soon. Still he could reason — but no longer care. The room, the table, the very chair in which he sat, seemed foolish things. He wondered why they had ever mattered; how, ever, he could have been concerned with them; why he should have noticed even the little flaws and colours in them. He even touched them to be quite sure, and with a mild, a mental and unemotional surprise, that they were there. He wondered what time it was; but that, of all things, was the least. Sleeping or waking, it was all a dream. Days came and went — days and days, and days — indefinitely. And it seemed so natural to be there, alone. Quite peaceful to be by himself.

It was all so simple — not to be striving, or planning, or hoping, any more.

He had been all wrong. Even the flowers on the wall, that he had thought so ugly, were really lovely when he came to look at them: friendly things, nodding and smiling in the wind, and beautifully reflected in the waters. It came to him that these were those "still waters" that he had heard of, long ago. One could lie down beside them, and be quite content. So perfectly at rest that it was not worth while to go and see if the brickyard was still there, below the bridge. It had been burned anyway. He ought to let them know at the *Gazette*. Perhaps he would — some day. Not now. This was a holiday. All day long, and to-morrow — if he liked, forever — he had only to lie still and listen to his thoughts, and watch the cloud-drift and the lilies. They were strange lilies — lilies, and not-lilies. There were thousands of them — thousands; and they grew upon a wall. And in their midst — while he was watching them, and wondering — suddenly a door opened.

Through it, with a cry of joy, all that lost world of sense surged in upon him, encircling him with the warm, kind arms of love! . . .

Barbara had come back from Toodlums.

## XI

### WHERE GARDENS MEET

HE had come hastily, and alone, because she had been told to come. Something, who or what she could not say, but it was not a person, nor anything that he had written or had failed to write — those days and days that he had waited there in silence had been but hours after all — Something in her heart, she said, had told her that she must come. And, in one glance, she knew that Something had been divinely kind, divinely merciful.

It was not a long illness, nor a fatal, nor even an unhappy one. For pain was softened by delirium; and when it vanished, under the ministrations of angelic care, the peace of lying there so still and cool after the fire of conflict, and so free — that heavy hand lifted from his life at last, so that he could breathe again — was like nothing that he had known since childhood. It was as if childhood had come back to visit him. Once more he could dream again, blameless;

unmenaced from without, and from within all unreproached by that ceaseless warning to be up and doing. Within, silence — the silence of that hidden garden with its fountain of eternal hope, and its long, long tender vistas, from which the mist had cleared. Without — that silence of a woman's love.

Now too he tasted those sweets of pity hitherto denied. Friends — he had never dreamed there were so many — left fruit and books, flowers to adorn his room, and, better still, words that were like frankincense and myrrh to him, and some like gold that he would always treasure. He caught strange glimpses into walled gardens that he had never guessed. Men whom he had thought he knew, who had been impatient or derisive of his claims upon them, and who had laughed to scorn all secret beauty and outward tenderness of life, held doors ajar — awkwardly, it is true, but with pathetic kindness; doors that, creaking on their rusty hinges, disclosed to him paths and arbours, neglected and falling to decay, but still abloom with those hopes and faiths that are perennial; that will not die, but struggle on, even in desertion and forgetfulness, striving with little humble flowers to keep a refuge for man's sure return, in hours of his need.

Stranger still — to Barbara a tender mystery —

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was the kindness of that one across the hall! She had been amazed and touched — shamed, she confessed, humbled to her very knees, that a stranger of whom her thoughts had been so pitiless, and from whose merest touch or glance she had held herself aloof, could, when her hour came, of need and loneliness, be so forgiving and so merciful. It was this girl of whom Jeremy had been vaguely conscious as a ministering angel, with Barbara; who, at the first, until he wakened to himself again — when she withdrew, and never afterward would venture nearer than the door — had shared with Barbara the long night-watches, and softened with a mysterious sympathy the pain of waiting and suspense. They had mingled their very tears.

"It was when I asked her why," Barbara related. "Why she should care so much. She shook her head; and, all at once, she burst out crying. She *did* care," Barbara added, thoughtfully. "All I know is, that some one, once, had been very kind to her. Some man, it was. He was not a lover. He was just a — just a passerby, she said. But, since then, life had been very different. Somehow — she didn't say."

There were other mysteries. Just what it was that people owed to Jeremy, none of them could tell. It

was not money. It was not counsel. Yet it was a debt. And they spoke of it to Barbara as one that they could not repay—yet did repay, in a currency of light, which they did not seem at all aware of, but which brightened up his room for him, and warmed his heart to a consciousness of priceless riches, while it touched Barbara to happy tears. It illumined even that future of which they did not speak, but only waited for, in thankfulness that it was to be at all. There were premonitions in the air; in the lull and silence, a sweet expectancy: the thrill of some impending change. As if that kindness which had stolen in upon their life under the cover of bleak, wintry days, were some new springtime, in which the past, sorrows and joys alike, would soon be bursting into flower, against the fruitage of their dreams. In its promise, nothing that was beautiful, nothing that was kind, seemed strange. It seemed but natural that the Editor, coming himself in haste when the news reached him, should promise Barbara that Jerry should have work again. And, there in the shadows of the hall where he breathlessly delivered his eager message, and in that dim confusion of Barbara's relief and joy, it seemed but natural that he should press her hands in his, in token of good cheer.

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And that, in token of that nameless bond between them, ere he hurried back into the heartless world again, both standing speechless, he should touch her forehead with his lips.

Ah, yes! It was too early yet to talk of failure! Jeremy himself could see it now—now that Love had lighted up his life again.

### II

"You forgot *us!*" she said reproachfully. "Or, rather, you reckoned us — me and the other Jeremy — not as assets at all; but only as liabilities!"

It was quite true.

"But you wouldn't have done so," she conceded, "if you only could have seen him!"

That also was quite true. Barbara's eyes convinced him of that; for they were always seeing "him," always shining at something in the air that to Jeremy, as yet, was little more than a cherub's head with wings, hovering above Barbara's transfiguration.

"You ought to see his eyes!"

"You ought to see your own!" he answered. He began to understand somewhat those ancient pictures of the Madonna and her Child. Never again would they seem so strange, or antiquated.

"And, after all," Barbara reminded him, "bad as it is to lose one's foothold, dear, couldn't you imagine something worse?"

It was not so difficult. On the contrary it was very easy to imagine something worse just then, with that fond new sense of her illumined presence. What it had meant to him, what he had missed in its absence, what it had restored to life in its return — all that, and the knowledge that such things vanish sometimes like a dream, and become as those other angels that he could only trust, but never see, or hear, or hold thus humbly in his arms — moved him to a sense of shame and wonder, at his forgetfulness.

"Why, suppose," she told him, "that that one little story should be the *only* one; you would still be You!"

Love's old sweet argument.

"And you would still have Us!"

Love's old appeal; but twice as brave, twice as sure, as it had used to be!

"You would still have things that to other men are only rainbows!"

It was all unanswerable. But, for all her cheer, the old wistfulness would come back into his face.

"But *I* see rainbows."

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"And I!" she answered. "But the place we see them from, you and I, is so lovely in itself!"

This was the truth that she was always telling him. "I never think of it as just this room under the eaves. We are here, yes—but we are *not* here. It is so much larger, so much more peaceful and beautiful, where we *really* are! Where we are not mere *folks*, struggling —"

She smiled whimsically.

"— struggling with the financials and the physicals!"

She pressed his hand.

"You know what I mean. I mean where we are *not* mere skimpy, little, achey, worried people, skurrying about in faded clothes, and trying to hide behind our smiles—but something better, something nobler than all that! That is one side—the shabby side of us. And it's the one that other people make the most of—unless they love us. And it *is* funny sometimes; but mostly sad. It isn't even half the story — *is* it?"

She leaned her head against his own.

"They don't know where we live, dear, do they? . . . Nor what we see! . . . Nor even what we are!"

In the silence, which he would not break—it was so much more true than any words that he could find

to utter—the encircling sense of that fair, inviolate seclusion which they had come to share, and knew they shared; its shadowy mysteries, of peace in the very midst of strife, of light in darkness, of forms and fragrances that would never fade, save in some passing blindness, and of melodies that would never cease, though drowned sometimes in that outer din; and far beyond, into the unknown future, those long perspectives that did not end with death—all these were speech to them. Nor is life ever half so eloquent, half so sacred, as it is in these illumined silences.

## III

Little by little, thus, they had come to know each other. Word by word, glance by glance, mood by mood, silence by silence, they had discovered those secrets of each other's spiritual history and romance, in the light of which they saw each other now as beings not merely to be cherished, but to be far more deeply reverenced and pitied than they had dreamed. It was a solemn thought to her, that she alone knew him for what he was. That, whatever he might seem to others upon that plane of life where he would always be a stranger, it was given to her alone to see him in this nobler realm of the divine romance:

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here among his memories and his aspirations, his strivings and defeats and victories — all those daily tragedies and heroisms, whose scene and setting are a garden hidden from the world. Here he was a figure whose chivalry, seemingly so futile, and so obscure, touched her to tears. His very loneliness was enough for that. And the unblemished honour of which sometimes it was so hard for him to keep the letter, in the makeshifts of a losing battle with that other world; and the patient courage, which had fainted in the stifling atmosphere of hopes deferred — love must save them! It must drive back those gathering shadows in his eyes, which told her where doubt and fear had begun already to shroud the light of his idealism. Love must do this. For only love has eyes to see, or heart to pity and adore, or hands to save. It is the work of women and of angels.

"It isn't poverty, or obscurity, that I fear," she told him.

"What is it that you fear?"

"Ever to see you change — to see your face harden, and its light go out. I could bear anything but that."

There was no answer but the sudden pressure of his hand.

"And it isn't only of ourselves that I am thinking," she reminded him.

No need to tell him that! There, always now, was that other Jeremy hovering above their tenderest confidences. He was always relevant; and from one to another of the three of them, their thoughts slipped easily, swiftly, without a break — to and fro, like coloured threads in a design. Love was weaver.

And it was strange, but at the mere remembrance of that little Helplessness, Jeremy was strong again — all his old courage surging back into his stricken life. Or, rather, it was a new courage that he had never known before. A courage that had nothing to do with dreams, their failure or their fulfillment. Or, rather, he was thinking now, not of his own dreams any longer, but of another's that were yet to be; and that would be dimmed or brightened, according as he lost, or kept, the light youth borrows from a father's eyes.

Courage for another's sake: it was something very different from courage for one's self! It put new ground under his feet. And when he turned and looked — behold! he stood above where he had been before! Higher, safer, freer — out of reach of hands that before had dragged him down: the clutch of those deadly fears that vanish in unselfishness!

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Here was a higher air in which he breathed again, and far more deeply, far more calmly, than he had ever breathed before. In which he saw the littleness of things that had been big to him — and the ghostliness of things that had been solid and impenetrable barriers. *This*, it came to him, was that “service which is perfect freedom.” Love — Love was the secret. Love *first*; then, lo! — Hope and Faith were by his side.

He said nothing, but the vision was in the kindling of his face, and in that pressure of his hand.

And Barbara knew. For her also Love was the secret. It was the secret of her tender insight, and its discovery of those fair ideals that he had pondered in his heart, that he had kept before him even in the dark — that she had seen even through the veil of his poor accomplishment.

“They don’t know where we live! Nor what we see! Nor even what we are!”

It was thus that she had spoken. And it was true. For there where gardens meet, so openly that they seem to mingle, where intervening barriers have been obliterated by Love’s concessional or overgrown by its concealing grace, so that they who dwell in kindred and adjoining mysteries may walk together the same

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embowered paths, gazing upon the self-same vistas, listening to the same far melodies, breathing the same sweet freedom of an eternal air — they, they only, know what Love may be, even upon earth. It is the love to which the angels minister — that higher joy which man seeks in vain upon the lower levels of the sense, however passing sweet. And those who know it need not mind how small Space is for them: they know no bounds. Nor how Time flees: for there its touch has lost all power to destroy. The terrible phantom with the glass and scythe is seen to be nothing but a mild old under-gardener of immortal loveliness.

## XII

### THE VALE OF SILENCE

IT WAS thus that Jeremy found himself, one day, an Assistant Real-estate Editor — he to whom the solid earth was so unsubstantial, and whose pen, tracing henceforth the record of Sites and Sales, Values and Permits and Sub-divisions, moved vaguely in a trance, writing in a foreign language of things that were not in the beginning, were not now, nor ever would be, real to him.

Whose dream it was that was being realized, he never could make out. Doubtless there were men who had seen such visions; doubtless, they, too, were realizing unrealities. It was a strange sensation to know that he was sitting at another man's desk; and that, somewhere, some one else was sitting at his own! — by right of dreams. For here, beyond a doubt, he was — or seemed to be: he sometimes questioned it at first — in a new corner of the old office where he had failed so miserably as himself, succeeding as

another! At least not failing any more — how, or why, he could not say. For all day long he wrote the merest fairy tales! Or moved, spellbound, in unheard-of places, asking strange, idle questions, and listening to answers that did not matter — jotting them down upon innocent white sheets of paper that were not more helpless than himself!

That day when he brought the news home to Barbara, they sat and gazed at each other, until her mind could be born anew.

*"A Real-estate Editor!"*

Echo: "Real-estate Editor!"

*"A Real —"*

She burst out laughing.

"But . . . but *wby?*"

Echo: "Why?"

Why, indeed? All he could tell was, that he had been ill in the very nick of time to get well again in the one week, of all the weeks in history, when another young man rose from his desk in wrath and renounced Real Estate forever. And Jeremy, it seems, arriving at the office of his friend the editor half an hour late, by reason of a broken shoestring —

*That was why.*

It was the shoestring. Barbara always declared

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it was the shoestring. For Jeremy, entering when he did, in the very midst of the dilemma, found himself acclaimed, and was consecrated on the spot, the Very Man! — the one young, promising, assistant-looking person available in all the universe that hour, to step into the breach.

"But you don't *know* anything about Real Estate," Barbara reminded him.

"That's what I told them. They said it didn't matter. What they needed was a man."

"But, Jerry dear . . . well, after all, we should be thankful."

Jeremy sighed.

"Oh, doubtless I shall make a hit," he mused.

"Why?" she asked. It was not Jeremy who had spoken so. It was the Assistant Real-estate Editor. "Why," she insisted, "do you say that?"

"Because," he answered, "I never dreamed of it. And will never —"

He gazed thoughtfully out of the window.

"— never care!"

### II

It was something to be thankful for, indeed — every Saturday, just at noon, when, in a brown paper

envelope thrust out at him through a grated window, he drew the wages of amazement.

For Jeremy it was the beginning of that vale of silence in which men gaze at one another, pondering in their hearts whither they are going in such strange fashion of a dream; whether it be chance, or providence, that has brought them where they find themselves, in unsought ways; or some missing of the road, perhaps, for which they are themselves to blame. Jeremy Ladd and J. Lad, the Assistant Real-estate Editor — it was J. Lad on the brown paper envelopes — argued between themselves what the philosophy of round pegs in square holes might be, and the inscrutable purpose of discrepancies. To be paid by that cunning old Shylock of a world for the little that one knew, while the much was so utterly unmarketable — "I don't see why!" as Barbara used to say. Neither did Jeremy. But doubtless they would see, some day. And meanwhile —

Always *meanwhile!* Life's password! — Life itself had whispered it to them at last. The open sesame to all those joys and wonders that are not a dream, to be missed, or waited for; or, if a dream, one that is so safe, and sure. He had but to look at Barbara and the Other Jeremy, or even but to think of them, to

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know that they were far more relevant than any of those riddles with which men scatter the few wits they have. And it was strange, but the sweetness of life lay largely in those kindly ironies by which its burdens and rebuffs turned out to be its blessings and caresses. Love, always, was the transforming magic. He had noticed that. Love, doubtless — somehow — was behind it all.

Even now, behind that grim, sardonic mask of fate, it might be smiling at him!

So he smiled back.

And, instantly, the air cleared!

The mask vanished!

In the twinkling of an eye, in faith again — always in faith, but now not merely in its high-strung gallantry, but as well in that divine good humour which is reckoned commonly a mere human thing — the old, old spirit of romance came back into his heart — singing!

### III

He did, I believe, some very pretty writing now. It may be doubted if Real Estate ever had its due before, in the columns of the daily press. For the more he looked at it, the more he discovered that behind it all — always *bebend* it all, in this illusive

life of ours — behind the Facts, there was now and then a beautiful Idea discernible. At the very least, a background that lent itself to something that was almost poetry: of phrase, or chronicle. Mists of fog or smoke softened the outlines of the newest buildings as they rose like towers of Babel into the upper air. So also there was the eternal glamour of adventure in their enterprise. And sometimes antique memories among their modern hopes. Many a loving moment Jeremy spent over the precious record of a mullioned window, or a cloistered passageway. It was the old brickyard life all over again! That old, old making-the-most of meagreness — the frugal treasuring of the occasional, of fleeting echo and transient gleam; with now and then a wistful glance, over the weigh-bills and across those waters of separation, into a magic and illimitable distance of the withheld and the unattained.

They were happy days. For in this quiet smiling in life's face, the spirits of evil that are abroad no less than angels — seeing him so sweetly-humoured, I suppose, so reasonable withal, their best-aimed arrows glancing from that magic shield of faith — left him to his humble peace.

And who could say — it was still so early, fortune so mysterious, realizations sometimes so hard to

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recognize at first — what might not yet come true, even of those baffled dreams? Not that it mattered now, so much; but there were shoestrings yet that might be broken in the nick of time! Life stretched away, years and years. Later, sometime, when it was a little less insistent, they would go out into the country — Toodlumshire, perhaps — and settle down with a garden and a flock of chickens; and in the peace of all those quiet vistas that come to man by old red-apple trees and cottage fires, he would write. . . . Not what he *must* write, then. Only what he would!

Surely, in years and years, one might realize a dream like that.

So small a dream — the merest remnant. A last fond cottage, as it were, in Spain, with this ancient motto above its hearth:

*While I was musing, the fire burned*

He had chosen it himself. It seemed to him so much like Life, he said. To the rest of us, it seemed so much — so very much —! like Jeremy.

### IV

It was the very littleness of the asking that made it so hard for him to understand. To be denied so

slight a boon! To find it twilight ere the day, seemingly, had but well begun! Shadow by shadow, year by year, in the appointed fashion of man's lot, he would have grown accustomed to the darkness; even have welcomed it, as time for sleep.

But to have it descend so swiftly, out of the noon-day sky! And with that old, old foolishness of life — that old confusion and bewilderment. Nothing where one looked for it, nothing when one wished for it, nothing when one needed it — not even time, when one had learned to wait! No unity, no plot, no rhyme, nor reason, nor even decency and order. Ebb and flow without a calendar. Entrance and exit without a cue. And now, in the very midst of folly, a crisis so preposterous! A summons from the *King Himself* — all unannounced by any herald voice or trumpeting, all unattended by any fitting pomp or pageantry! And *this* — this breaking of some merest shoestring — was the end of knighthood and the divine romance!

Jeremy said nothing, but his smile vanished and his face blanched.

And nothing mattered any more.

To those who saw him it was plain that the end had come indeed. The last chapter of a strange

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story — and no one could say just what he thought of it, nor whether it had been worth the reading, nor even what it meant. Only that it was true, and left one dumb and wondering, like one's own strange story.

Barbara herself was silent now. To her alone he ever spoke again, turning his head one day, a little, to say faintly:

"I was just . . . beginning . . . to learn how to live."

And even Love could find no answer but its tears to that.

But — just at the last, while she was watching — suddenly, in the flash of an instant, his pale face shone again, and all his visions came back into his wondering eyes!

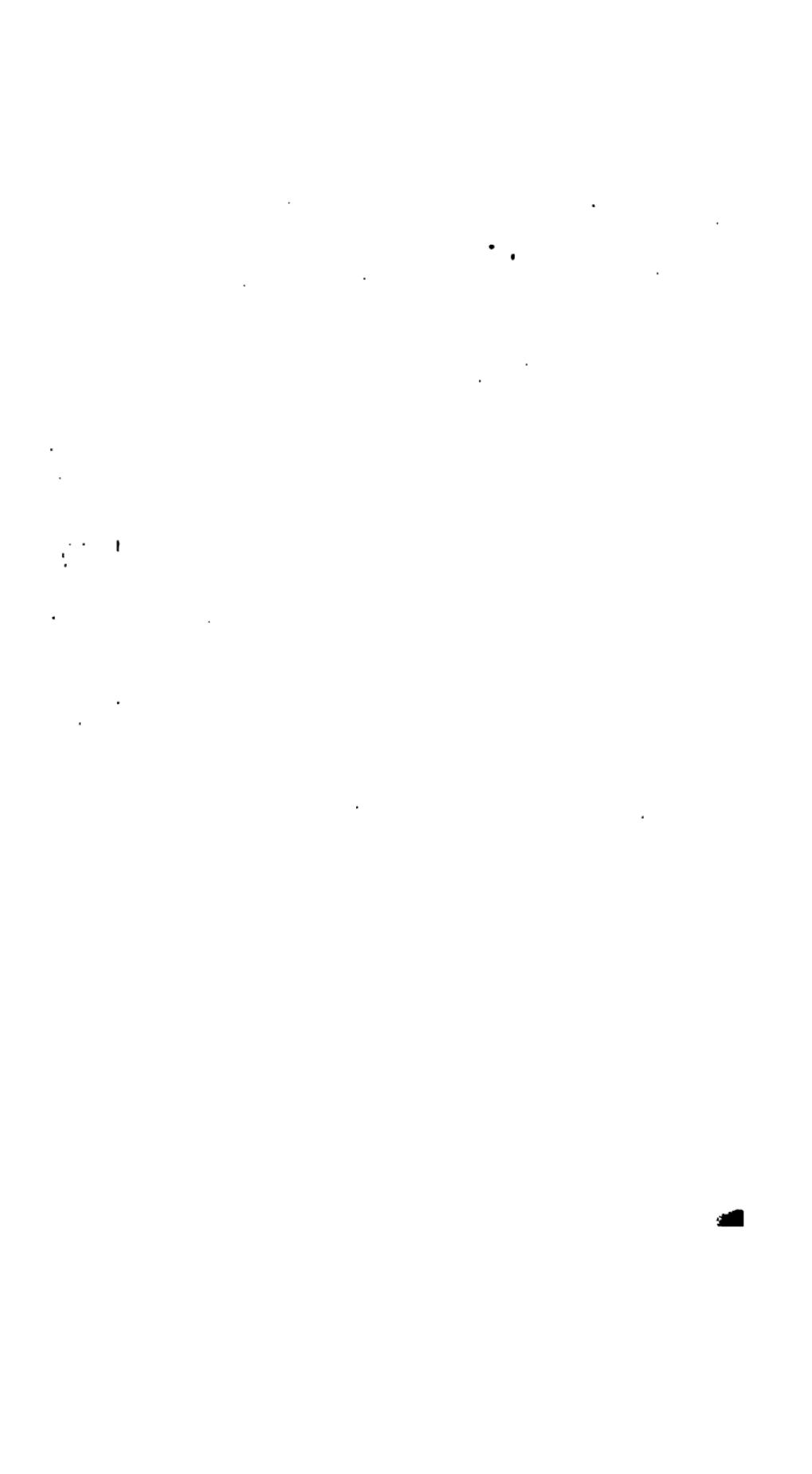
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